THE SALON OF MADAME NECKER

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MADAME NECKER

Novel

BY

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THE SALON

OF

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CHAPTER I.

THE ARCHIVES AT COPPET.

THE philosophy of history is no longer in fashion with us; it does not now find favour with the public. Our era, particular as to facts, and disdainful enough of theoretical ideas, has taken a keen interest in the smallest details relating to past times—but, by a strange contradiction, it repudiates more strongly than ever their political traditions—and gives but little thought to the large ideas of generalisation in which the writers of the early part of this century used to delight in searching for the secrets of the future. Erudition as to past ages now holds its sway; and

the art of deciphering almost unreadable manuscripts is, by some, held to be of greater value than being able to relate the events of history, or explaining what may be learned from them. The abuse of our present system, I am persuaded, will sooner or later lead us to a reaction, and we shall be forced to recognise that, in spite of appearances, it is still ideas that govern the world. Let us confess, however, that to this system, and even to its excesses, we are indebted for many pleasant books, and many pleasant hours of reading. If at times I am disposed to complain of a too frequent use being made of unpublished papers, I am nevertheless fully sensible of the value of these documents, in which men and women who lived so long ago seem to come directly before us and make to us an avowal of their passions, of their craft, of their joys and of their woes. If these involuntary confessions have so much interest for us when they are related in a book that thousands may read, what then does one not owe to some happy chance, when alone by oneself amidst these archives as yet unexplored, holding in one's hands pages which time has turned yellow, on which the warmth of fleeting thoughts are ineffaceably written, and seem now to ridicule their own existence? What do you not feel when you see the small sand, once used to dry up the ink, still

clinging to the paper, showing you that you have been the first to disturb the relics of some bygone age? The smallest sheet of paper then becomes animated with an existence of its own. A letter, some rough sketch, a few words written rapidly upon an envelope, or upon a card, seem to you to be worth investigating,—let the trouble be what it may,—for here is the voice of a human creature now whispering into your ear. In discoveries of this kind, tempting ideas glitter before us, but we should be upon our guard before giving them to the world. Yet, while the glitter lasts, we cannot help feeling that the illusion is peculiarly pleasant and sweet.

It will therefore be easily understood that it was not without some feelings of emotion that I saw opening before me the gate of the old tower in which the archives of Coppet Castle are kept. I well knew that no one from idle curiosity had been allowed to go inside this gate, whose great iron girdings used, in my childhood, to fill me with awe and respect; and I think that even a foreigner would not have been insensible to the delight of looking over these records, showing the life of two generations and two societies now past and gone. But I must say also at the same time that if these documents were only family papers I would not try, even by the most partial publication, to satisfy the

curiosity that always exists as to the private life of people whose names have more or less come before the world. But, in fact, there were few men or women of any position at the end of the last century, or at the beginning of this one, from the time of Voltaire to that of Chateaubriand, from the Duchesse de Choiseul to Mme. Récamier, whose handwriting or whose names may not be found in the twenty-seven volumes of letters addressed either to M. or to Mme. Necker, or in the bundles, scarcely sorted or divided, containing the papers of Mme. de Staël. Speaking now only of M. and of Mme. Necker—who for the present will claim our attention—Buffon, Grimm, Marmontel, d'Alembert, Diderot, Mme. du Deffand, Mme. Geoffrin, Mme. d'Houdetot, and many others whom I might cite, were among their friends and correspondents. As the smallest fragments of unpublished letters of celebrated people are everywhere eagerly read, I shall give the most interesting of those that I have now before me. The *salon* of Mme. Necker certainly had its share of influence in bringing about the ideas that were prevalent before the time of the French Revolution; and one may say that, open as it was almost until the outbreak of the great crisis, it remained the last *salon* under the old state of society. It is this small world that I shall endeavour to describe, trying, at the same time, to give a life and real

existence to the persons concerned. But to paint the *salon* of Mme. Necker in its true light, I would ask my readers to allow me to present to them again the mistress of the house, who perhaps (as we shall see presently) is not so well known to them as they may imagine. I will bring before them her friends and her daily visitors; and, as we go along, I shall be able to show how she understood the fulfilment of her duty both as a wife and as a mother. It is, I think, worth while to study with some attention this group of people to whom certainly neither brilliancy, nor merit, nor ambition were wanting; my only hope is that my readers may be able to take some small part of the interest in my attempt that I myself have taken in performing my task.

And yet I have at times never been able to shake off a certain melancholy feeling brought about by an intimate acquaintance with that which no longer exists. Whilst in my silent tower I was turning over, at first nervously, and afterwards with more indifference, these letters, these papers, and these daily journals, to which were confided so many secrets, so many desires, and so many passions, by degrees, as time went on, I felt that there was breathing forth from them a glow of sadness that completely overcame me. As I dived down into the recesses of a past time that seemed to be so near to

me, and yet so distant, I felt myself almost buried under the mass of long-forgotten details that had become so closely bound up with more important matter. To how many deaths have not the walls of Coppet Castle been witness from the day when, after the death of his wife, M. Necker shut himself up in a small room where everything told him of her presence, there to give way to his tears, down to the time, now not long since, when a large but chosen crowd of people followed to her last resting-place the faithful keeper who had watched over the old building as over a sanctuary which held the inmost treasures of her heart? [1] And how often, too, has not the rude hand of life, always strong and vigorous, swept away some fragile hindrance that sorrow and regret had set up against its passage! And now a new generation is growing up in these places, the home of so much sorrow, like those pale roses which are planted among the ruins; and their listless indifference to memories which to others was so precious is but another sign of that which is irrevocably gone. Perhaps we owe something to those who have lived before us; and I

[1] Until the month of December, 1876, Coppet Castle still belonged to the daughter-in-law of Madame de Staël, the Baroness Auguste de Staël, *née* Vernet. It came to her by inheritance after the death of her husband, and then of her son. It is now the property of Madame la Comtesse d'Haussonville, the daughter of the Duchesse de Broglie, who was the daughter of Mme. de Staël.

shall have performed my task if I succeed in creating some sympathy for a woman who, living as she did in corrupt times, had but the caprices of those around her, while she herself possessed the virtues only to be found in a noble and generous heart.

CHAPTER II.

THE CURCHOD FAMILY—THE PARSONAGE AT CRASSIER—SOCIETY IN LAUSANNE.

THE parsonage in the little village of Crassier, or Crassy, just on the borders of France and the Canton of Vaud, stands immediately opposite to the Protestant church. It is an unpretending house, painted white, and with green shutters. A small garden and a few old fruit-trees barely separate it from the high-road. There is nothing to distinguish it from the other houses round about. In this parsonage Mme. Necker was born; and on the 2nd of June, 1737, she was taken to the village church, there to receive the name of Suzanne. Her father, Louis Antoine Curchod, for many years before had been the evangelical minister at Crassier. In spite of the humbleness of his position and his un-aristocratic-sounding name, it appears that Louis Antoine Curchod came from an old Vaud family, which in years gone by had more than once intermarried

with the nobility of the district, but which the slips of fortune had since reduced to a more modest condition. This Curchod family—it was sometimes called Curchodi, and even de Curchod—had divided itself into two branches, one of which went on living in the Canton of Vaud, while the other followed the fortune of the dukes of Savoy. But when Mme. Necker, a few years after her marriage, wished to give an air of authenticity to the repute which her family had long enjoyed of old and honourable extraction, and when she secretly endeavoured to gain the opinion of the sieur Chérin [1] as to the worth of those titles to nobility which she had taken so much pains in collecting, she experienced no slight mortification. It was all in vain that she produced a certificate from the Chatelaine of Avenches [2] showing that "there had been formerly in the old town of Avenches, that was burned by Attila, King of the Huns, in the year 450, a family of the name of Curchodi;" it was all in vain that she laboured to prove

[1] Bernard Chérin, born at Amborville, in Champagne, the 20th of January, 1718, died in Paris the 21st of May, 1785. He was genealogist and historiographer to the orders of St. Lazarus, of St. Michael, and of the Holy Spirit. He was also often called genealogist to the king.

[2] Avenches, or in ancient times called Aventicum. This little town in the Canton of Vaud still possesses some ruins and Latin inscriptions that have frequently attracted the notice of the archæologists; among others, that of Mr. Mommsen.

that in the year 1300 Batardo Curchodi was squire to the Duke of Savoy, and that in the year 1536 the Duke Charles had written a letter to Jean Curchodi just like one of those he ordinarily wrote "to the gentlemen who were his favourites";—the sieur Chérin still remained inflexible, and told her that, "it was with great reluctance he was constrained to say that her proofs were insufficient to warrant a decree from the Court." Mme. Necker was obliged to console herself by carefully tying up her papers and putting them together in a small wooden box,—on the lid of which she wrote with her own hand: "Titles of nobility in the Curchodi family." In that box they now remain.

The mother of Mme. Necker was of French origin; her maiden name was d'Albert de Nasse. Her parents, both born in the little town of Montélimart, belonged to the reformed religion; and they were obliged to leave France to escape the persecutions to which, under the reign of Louis XV., the Protestants still found themselves exposed. They fled to Lausanne, and the impression which Mlle. d'Albert made there in the small circle of good society was for a long time pleasantly remembered. Many years afterwards, an old lady, a friend of her mother's, wrote to Mme. Necker: "I was at Lausanne when the pretty Mlle. d'Albert arrived there. People were always talking of her

beauty and of her unselfishness, because she had chosen to marry the late M. Curchod, who, though not a rich, was a very good man, instead of making a brilliant marriage; thus giving up all the advantages which she might have enjoyed in her own country." The daughter of the minister at Crassier used to be fond enough of recalling her lineage. She used often to sign her letters Curchod de Nasse; and once, when she was staying in Paris before her marriage, it was as Mlle. d'Albert de Nasse that she begged her friends to address their letters to her.[1]

If firmness of character and strong religious principles were transmitted from the mother to the daughter this double inheritance was again increased by the instruction she received from her father. Suzanne Curchod went through the good, though somewhat severe, course of education which is still nowadays given to many girls in that part of Switzerland where the French

[1] I have been informed by a learned gentleman, an inhabitant of Montélimart, M. de Coston, who is now writing a history of his native town, that the nobility of the family of d'Albert de Nasse is quite as doubtful as that in the Curchod family. M. de Coston has examined documents that were drawn out by a notary, and it would appear that Magdeleine Albert (not d'Albert), the mother of Mme. Necker, was the daughter of Jean Albert, advocate, and of Magdeleine Repara. It is not very clear why they assumed the other name, Nasse, for the only property possessed by the Albert family was called Cardenaux. However, in all those letters in which Mme. Necker's mother is mentioned she is always spoken of as Mlle. d'Albert.

language is spoken. In these Protestant countries there are few families belonging to the better classes of society which do not include a minister teaching the gospel. And if this admixture of the clergy with the laity seems to lower the position of a member of the Church, on the other hand it raises the feeling of family respect, and maintains in social intercourse—perhaps at the expense of gaiety and enjoyment—a certain tone of propriety which elsewhere is not always observed in the best society. Many young girls, brought up from their infancy in a pure and wholesome atmosphere, contract early in life the habit of usefully employing themselves; they there acquire the taste for good conversation, and in after years they will profit by their early training when they are obliged to busy themselves with the domestic duties which form a large part of the daily work of every woman in the Cantons of Vaud and of Geneva. If one does not find among them many Julia d'Etanges—a reproach so singularly brought against them by Rousseau—their severe graces are at least worth as much as the impassioned ardour of the new Héloïse; and their somewhat cold aspect, due to their early bringing up, does not diminish their intellectual qualities, nor does it lessen the true warmth of their hearts.

M. Curchod took great pleasure in developing the

facile and precocious intelligence of his only child, in whom all his affections were concentrated, and he gave to her the same instruction that he might have given to a boy. When she was sixteen, Suzanne Curchod was able to write a letter in Latin to one of her father's friends, and this gentleman with much delight wrote back to her:—"Domina, non sine ingenti quadam doctrinæ admiratione, Ciceroniam tuam epistolam legi ac perlegi. Quoad metum, quo laborasti, nempe cachinnis causam præbere? Quis doctus, aut erudita, si exstat, aliquo judicio ingenioque præditi, irridere possent, tantam eruditionem in tam molli planta animadvertentes?" In spite of these encouragements, Suzanne Curchod had the good taste not to continue her Ciceronian correspondence. But I should not be surprised to hear that she had learnt a little Greek; for amongst the letters addressed to her (she had had a large correspondence even when she was young) I find there is one, written indeed in the French language, but with Greek characters, and signed 'Επαμινῶνδας. She had also a taste for science, and instructed herself in geometry and physics from books which she borrowed from the professor's library at Geneva or at Lausanne. A few years after her marriage Professor Lesage[1] wrote to her:

[1] George Louis Lesage, a Swiss physician, was born at Geneva on the 13th June, 1724. His parents were French, and they had been

"If you regret the conversations that we had together, they are also a matter of much regret to me, because you understood the exposition of my system most admirably well, and this leads me to think that you would understand also the proofs upon which I based my facts." These heavy studies did not prevent her from practising the more pleasing arts. She played on the harpsichord, on the tympanum, she learnt the violin, and she knew something about painting.

All these intellectual advantages would probably not have been sufficient to account for the many attentions which, as we shall presently see, were paid to young Suzanne Curchod, if she had not also possessed those attractions which men, even in the Canton of Vaud, value so highly in young girls. The reader will recollect, that the beauty of Mme. Curchod had formerly been much talked about in Lausanne; and Suzanne in quite as strong a degree had received from her mother the same precious inheritance. Her portrait by Duplessis,[1] which has been frequently engraved,

expatriated because of their religion. He was received as a citizen in 1760, and died in Geneva the 9th November, 1803. He was a correspondent of the Academy of Sciences; and he wrote several reports on mathematical subjects and on geometry, all of which have not been printed. His unpublished papers are in the Geneva library. M. Sayons has devoted a few pages to him in his *Histoire du XVIII^e· Siècle à l'Etranger*.

[1] Joseph Sifrède Duplessis, born at Carpentras in 1725, admitted as

gives the idea of a woman in whom great delicacy of outline and elegance of expression had been preserved even up to an advanced age. But these charms which time had not been able to destroy were in her younger days set off by a most lovely complexion, soon destined from uncertain health to lose the brilliancy of its colour. But to give an exact idea of what Suzanne Curchod was like in the bloom of her youth I will refer to her own description; and though it may appear somewhat credulous to put much faith in the portrait of a woman painted by herself, the words which I am now about to quote, and which I find written in her own handwriting, correspond so nearly to the testimony of her contemporaries that we cannot be left in doubt as to the accuracy of the picture.

MY PORTRAIT.[1]

A face showing youth and joyfulness; fair hair, and a fair complexion, animated by blue, bright, soft, and sparkling eyes; a small but well shapen nose; a curling lip, whose smile responds to that of the eyes, yet adding a little grace; a large and well

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a member of the Royal Academy of Painting in 1774, died 1st April, 1802, at Versailles, where he occupied the position of Conservator of the Museum. As a portrait painter he was highly esteemed.

[1] M. Nadault de Buffon, the great nephew of the well known naturalist, has in his possession the engraving of a portrait of Mme. Necker. This picture must have been done when she was still a girl, for it corresponds accurately enough with the description here given.

proportioned figure, but wanting in that enchanting elegance which sets off the value; a country village manner in appearance, and a certain brusqueness of demeanour which strangely contrasts with a soft voice and modest aspect: such is the sketch of a picture which you may perhaps think to be too flattering.

This pretty village flower could not long adorn the garden of the country parsonage without attracting notice. In the small district where everybody saw and knew each other, and where everything going on was generally known, it soon came to be whispered about that the daughter of the pastor of Crassier was an accomplished girl, possessing all the charms of her own sex as well as the more solid advantages of the other. Her reputation soon brought to the parsonage at Crassier many visitors, who came to disturb the quiet retreat where, as she afterwards expressed herself, "she had passed her spring." Among these visitors the most numerous were young ministers, who, under the pretext of assisting M. Curchod in his pastoral duties, or of preaching for him, would come to spend the Sunday at Crassier and then return on the Monday to Geneva, or to Lausanne. Attracted by the perspective of pleasant hospitality these young assistants did not wait to be asked twice before they came to show off their powers to the good people of Crassier, who, by the way, little suspected the reason of such a reinforcement of preachers.

The daughter of the village pastor did not have much trouble in obtaining the written signatures of Isaac Cardoini and G. Francillon, both of them evangelical ministers, engaging themselves "to the most charming young lady Suzanne Curchod, to come to preach at Crassier whenever she should wish it, they undertaking to do so without instance, solicitation, or pressure, since they hold it to be their chief pleasure to oblige her upon every occasion."

Now as Crassier is about two miles distant from the lake, and as the coach from Geneva to Lausanne did not pass by that way, M. Curchod rewarded the zeal of his assistants by lending them his horse, *Grison*, who took them back into Geneva; and as it was also necessary to send back *Grison*, and to return thanks for the hospitality received at the parsonage, there sprang up between the young girl and the young ministers a frequent and animated correspondence, in which, on the part of the preachers, there were often enough polite compliments of a more than ordinary kind. I do not know what were the answers made by the young lady, but her conduct can hardly have been quite free from blame. For one of her friends, who was more outspoken than the rest, wrote to her: "You have many admirers who, under the pretext of preaching for your father, come to amuse themselves with you. Does not sound reason tell you

that as soon as they have done their preaching you ought to drive them out with a broomstick (un balai), or else hide yourself from them?" Suzanne Curchod might not unreasonably have replied to this new Alceste:

"Dois-je prendre un *balai* pour les mettre dehors?"

Though without likening her to Célimène, it does not seem that she was in a mood to have recourse to expulsions of this sort. The most ardent of her admirers who was held up as a reproach against her, was not a pastor but a sort of wit of the place. His name was Dariet Defoncene; and he, probably on account of his superiority of age, signed all the letters, both in verse and prose, that he wrote to Suzanne Curchod with the name Melchizedek. This went on until she remarked to him that his idea was more pagan than biblical. To his first pseudonym he then added Anacreon. This Melchizedek Anacreon showered down madrigals without end upon his modern Sappho,—for this was one of the names he chose for her; and some of his verses are at least as good as those which Marmontel, as we shall see farther on, rhymed and sent to Mme. Necker. He even went so far as to think that his greater age authorised him to address to her lines which, if addressed to any other girl but to the daughter of a clergyman, might be thought impassioned. The

following lines may serve as a sample, and they are not the most affectionate:

Ces yeux, cette gorge, ces traits,
Ce teint qui pénètre mon âme,
En m'annonçant d'autres attraits,
Me charme m'émeut et m'enflamme.
Mon cœur forme mille désirs ;
Mais votre éternelle morale,
Qui me fut toujours si fatale,
Empoisonne tous mes plaisirs.

At another time he was telling her of a dream in which she appeared to him, and in which the moralising, perpetually held up before him, seemed to relax its vigour. Here are the last two verses:

Je goûtois un sort plein de charmes ;
Rien ne traversoit mes désirs.
Heureux, sans crainte et sans alarmes,
Je m'enivrois dans les plaisirs.

Ne vous alarmez pas, Suzette,
Vous grondâtes, l'amour se tut.
Mon sommeil aima sa conquête,
Mon réveil, votre vertu.

Many years later, she who had once received such marks of homage without displeasure, could not hide from herself some feeling of embarrassment when she read over again these events of a time in her life which seemed to her to be difficult to recall; and we see how,

by a note in her journal, she justifies to herself her own conduct: "I had then little thought as to what was right and proper, for my simplicity kept such knowledge from me; and my head was turned by compliments."

It would, in fact, have wanted a stronger head than that given to most girls not to have been turned by so much adulation. Suzanne Curchod's parents, instead of foreseeing the disadvantages of their system of education, seem rather to have endeavoured to prepare her for a more open and a freer life. Everything in this world is comparative, and with them Lausanne was constantly before their eyes. If my readers, as I would hope, have not thought beneath their notice this little picture of pastoral life in the Canton of Vaud, which the interior of the parsonage of Crassier has offered to us, I imagine they will also like to see some description of the literary and social life in Lausanne at the time when Voltaire came to spread his rays of light over the banks of the Lake of Geneva. We must not altogether form our opinions as to these manners and habits from the enthusiastic letters of Voltaire to d'Alembert and to Moncrif,[1] he dated from his "petite cabine de Monrion," written, too, at a time when his powerful genius had stirred up this small quarter of the world and brought

[1] Paradis de Moncrif, a French man of letters, born in Paris in 1687, died in 1770.

back to life that which had almost gone to sleep. People used to rush in crowds to the performances at his theatre; they used to weep over the death of Zaïre; they would clap their hands when they saw him take the part of his own old Lusignan. And Voltaire wanted no stronger arguments to make him say that his two hundred spectators "were as good judges as any in Europe," and to declare that "his lovely romantic country had become a place of refuge for art, for pleasure, and good taste, and that Cæsar, when he was ravaging this little district, did not foresee that there would one day be found in it as much intelligence as there was in Rome." But in spite of the enthusiasm with which he spoke of his fifteen windows all looking on to the Lake of Geneva, it was not long before he sold his house and went back to the Délices to be nearer to the battle-field upon which he was to wage war with the Magnificent Council and the Venerable Consistory of Geneva. Nearly a century later, Sainte-Beuve pronounced upon this same Romance country a juster and calmer judgment. He said: "This country is very different from other countries. People here do not live a French life; they go to Paris seldom, and think very little about it. This world has a life of its own, peculiar to itself; one's thoughts always tend towards the lake." If life at Lausanne in the year 1837 was calm and peaceful, if the bent of one's thoughts

was then turned towards the lake, this must have been the case more strongly still in 1757. In spite of Voltaire's sojourn near the lake of Geneva we shall see that the ideas of people in this small world were much behind those of the century in general, and very constantly they showed themselves to be hardly more advanced than their predecessors, the guests in the Hôtel de Rambouillet.

At the time of which we are now speaking, Lausanne was deprived of her ancient privileges as an imperial town; the number of her inhabitants was reduced to nine thousand. She still enjoyed under the harsh, but energetic and enlightened government of their Excellencies at Berne, a state of tranquillity which her neighbour Geneva, racked by the agitations and quarrels of her native-born subjects, might well have envied. This future capital of the Canton of Vaud, docile and resigned under the domination of a bailiff sent from Berne, served then as a place of refuge for the nobility of the country, who began to show themselves tired of living in their castles as they had been deprived of their ancient authority and of their privileges. The representatives of these old feudal families, the Senarclens, the Loïs, the Lavigny's, the d'Hermenches —high-sounding names that seem to have been invented for the old romances—used then for the most part to

live in the Bourg quarter of the town. Their old houses blackened by time, and their pretty gardens running down towards the lake, still remain standing. Those who owned them had adopted an easy and idle existence instead of the life of turmoil and warfare borne by their forefathers. They had lost the rights and exemptions once due to nobility; but I like to think that there still remained some who attained that rare and happy ideal so well described by Madame de Charrière in her *Lettres écrites de Lausanne:*[1] "I picture to myself men who cannot become canons in the Church, nor yet Knights of Malta, who have to pay taxes, but who more strongly than others feel themselves obliged to be brave, disinterested, and true; men who think that they could not possibly do a mean thing; men who believe they have received from their ancestors, and who hold themselves bound to transmit to their children, a certain flower of honour, which is to virtue as a noble bearing is to bodily movement, which is what grace is to force and to beauty; men who pride themselves upon their courtly manner, all the more highly because it

[1] Isabelle, or Arabelle, van Tuill van Seerooskerken van Zuylen, born near the Hague in 1740, died at Colombier, near Neuchatel, the 27th December, 1805. She married M. de Charrière, a gentleman of the Canton of Vaud; and she wrote several charming works, among others, *Les Lettres de Lausanne,* and *Caliste.* As to Madame de Charrière, see Saint-Beuve's *Portraits of Women* (ed. 1870), and his *Literary Portraits* (vol. iii. ed. 1864).

conveys to their minds a something which they cannot express, and who do not themselves know to what length they would go to support and defend their honour, rather than see it destroyed or disgraced." Let all this be as it may, the last representatives of feudalism in the Canton of Vaud had abjured the haughty pride and the prejudices of nobility. On a fine summer's evening they would mix with the people who walked under the chestnut trees around the cathedral; they would join in the games, and they might often be seen dancing to the music that accompanied the songs.

On the slope of the hill, close by the old church of Notre Dame, and the bishop's palace, in the quarter of the City, another circle of friends, the professors and the students of the Academy or College of Lausanne, used also at this time to meet and hold their *réunions*. It is likely enough that the people in the Bourg quarter thought themselves above those in the City, because of their superiority of rank, and that the people in the City affected to look down upon those in the Bourg because of their frivolity; but owing to the easy softness of manners and disposition to a general friendly feeling, those in each society used, nevertheless, to see a good deal of each other. They had their set parties and their pic-nics, which latter amusement is still here much appreciated. The young ladies

of Lausanne formed among themselves a small society, known as the Société du Printemps. Their mothers were carefully excluded, but gentlemen were allowed. The young folk amused themselves with innocent games of all sorts; and friendships were made, which not unfrequently ended in happy marriages. This simple and honest life was assuredly very different from the ceremonious and corrupt manners then prevalent in Paris and at Versailles; but I think that some disappointment was felt after Voltaire had gone away, as there had also been some displeasure caused by the cavillings of which he was himself both the cause and the victim.

Suzanne Curchod was first brought to Lausanne by her parents about the time when *Zaïre* and *Adélaïde du Guesclin* were being played at the theatre in Monrion. We may imagine what was the emotion felt in a small circle of friends at the appearance of a young girl as clever as she was beautiful, and of whom it was said that, "she surpassed all the other girls by her good looks, and all the young lads in their learning." Twenty years later one of Mme. Necker's correspondents (it is true it was some one asking a favour) reminded her of her glory in past days:—

When I was studying the belles-lettres at Lausanne, M. Darney our professor, told us that the intelligence you possessed was

exceptionally strong for a woman, and he instanced you as one whom we ought to take for our model. As you passed along the street, always followed by a crowd of admirers, I used to hear every one say, "That is the pretty Miss Curchod!" I would run on so as to be able to see you; and as long as I dared I stood looking at you. And I had the honour once of dancing with you at the student's ball, of which you were declared to be the queen.

It was not long before she was considered to be the chief attraction at all the parties; and the demeanour she there preserved is thus described by one of her admirers (we shall see that she had a great many) in a letter he wrote to her:—

You were surrounded by cavaliers, who all wished to persuade you that you were wonderfully charming, just as though you did not know it. They would tell you a thousand times the same thing, and, as it seemed to me, all to no purpose; for I imagined from the ironical tone in which you answered them that they all possessed the talent of boring you intensely. As you sat upon your chair you leant forward with a sort of condescending air which showed plainly enough how poorly you thought of their conversation, and that you were yourself thinking of something much more interesting. After a while you roused yourself from your reverie, and that which had been the subject of your thoughts induced you to make a few observations to these gentlemen. I was altogether delighted with the intelligence which you showed; and there was even a little learning mixed with it. *My word! I saw plainly enough that you had read a book or two.*

During her frequent visits to Lausanne Suzanne Curchod received other compliments than the homage

given to her by young gentlemen, for her acquirements contributed perhaps as much to her success as did her beauty. If in the society of the Bourg quarter, people thought little of literature and cared not to set themselves up as wits, it was otherwise in the quarter of the City. The arrival of a young girl into this world of professors and students, which the early and increasing celebrity of the Lausanne Academy and of its College had brought about—of a girl who knew Latin, and who showed herself willing to talk on the most difficult problems in philosophy, —naturally enough excited men's minds, and created a spirit of generous emulation in the hearts of the masters and of the pupils. Under her influence the students of belles-lettres and *les petits proposants* (the theological students were thus designated) founded a literary *réunion* called the Académie des Eaux, ou de la Poudrière—a name taken from a spring in a valley close to Lausanne; and near to this spring the Academy used generally to hold its sittings. This new circle was composed of the wits of the country, and they called each other by names which one would say must have been taken from Mlle. de Scudéry's romances,—from *Clélie*, or from *Le Grand Cyrus:* Thémire, Céladon, Nizance, Sylvandre. Suzanne Curchod was named president of the Academy under the name of Thémire; and some of

the statutes drawn up under her order remind us of the love stories of the Middle Ages or of the Renaissance. I will quote the following:—

"In order that a happy bond of union may be established amongst us, the cavaliers shall wear the colours of the ladies whom they like best; the ladies shall also do the same. If any couple wish to change their colours they shall be held bound to set forth before the Academy the reasons for their change. The Academy will then decide the question.

"It shall be allowed to the ladies to filch the colours, ribbons, or other things from their cavaliers, and the cavaliers shall also enjoy the same privilege.

"If love wishes to take possession of the hearts of the members of the Academy, it is not to be exacted that they should have recourse to strong measures to shut the door against it or to drive it out. But since light-heartedness is a quality as useful as it is agreeable they may be counselled not to pride themselves upon too great heroic constancy."

The title of Chevalier of the Académie des Eaux (for so the members signed themselves) imposed upon them more serious obligations than choosing the colours of one of the ladies. In the first place, each candidate had to submit to the academicians, his future colleagues, a true portrait of himself, both under his physical and his

moral aspect; and when this was read, the votes were taken. He was afterwards expected to send occasionally to the Academy a copy of verses, or a dissertation in prose, to be read at one of the sittings. The lady president was the first to conform to this law. She sent to the Academy a few essays, as to which in after years she herself estimated the value accurately enough. She wrote on the outside sheet of her manuscript: "Some of these thoughts are delicate and true, but the language is very confused." As regards the verses, the odes, and the elegies, it is almost unnecessary to say that they were all addressed to the fair president, Thémire; and that they all expatiated upon the charms which her subjects enjoyed in her temple, and under her sceptre. That the votaries of love and pleasure might find their way to this temple, a new map of Tender had been drawn. Thémire's temple was placed in a small island in the middle of the stormy sea of Sentiment, near to the large empire of Love, and the only way to get there was by climbing the steep path, Sincere Esteem, which winds about between the two precipices, Haughty Prosperity and Brilliant Ambition. In addition to the labours which it imposed upon its members, the Academy used to hold general meetings. At one time they would discuss the project of establishing the rights of people between women, "maintaining that the hearts of men

were like the New World, a wild and uncultured country;" and they demonstrated the necessity for this new code of laws, "because of the disorders caused by the non-existence of a right of property between women as regards their principal possessions, which are the hearts of men." At another time they would ask, and answer for themselves, subtle questions, in which it would seem, under the presidency of a young girl, they were touching upon delicate matters: "Is love really made sweeter to us by reason of its mystery?" "Can the same kind of friendship exist between a man and woman as between two men, or two women?" "Which of all pleasures is the most delicate?" To this question all the members of the Académie de la Poudrière answered unanimously, "To make perfectly happy a person who before had been very unhappy, without being held bound to do so by any sort of obligation."

It seems to me that these documents, untouched since the day when they were carefully arranged and put away into their boxes, show to us a different sort of person from her whom we thought we already knew,—a girl rather pedantic perhaps, and inclined to set herself up as a wit, but lively, playful, fascinating, and, if the truth must be told, something of a coquette. But I should be very unwilling to make such an imputation against

the memory of one whose name is so honourable, if she herself, at this time, had not allowed others to bring against her the same reproach. A gentleman, older than she was, who undertook the task, always a most difficult one, to tell her of the remarks to which her conduct might perhaps give rise, thought himself entitled to write to her: "Even the gentlemen think that you make too plainly manifest your desire to please them. They know very well that the mind of every woman is actuated by the same thoughts, but they prefer that the truth should not be brought home to them too clearly." And she herself confessed ingenuously "that the praise which came from gentlemen was that which touched her the most nearly." In spite of what her austere censor might say, it does not appear that the gentlemen found it very difficult to forgive her faults. The number of Latin and of French verses is indeed considerable, in which, under names of Sappho, Thémire, Suzanne, or Suzette, her charms are abundantly set forth, and also letters in which we find declarations of love and offers of marriage. I shall not be so unnecessarily indiscreet as to publish the wit of these rejected lovers, but among those who aspired to win the hand of Suzanne Curchod there was one whose acquaintance with her has excited some degree of curiosity. I mean Gibbon. There is no written life of the English historian, however short,

in which we do not read that he fell in love with Suzanne Curchod during his first stay at Lausanne; and that after asking her in marriage, he was obliged at last to yield to the formal opposition made by his father. Gibbon himself tells us so much in his own *Memoirs.* But there are documents which will allow me to give the story more at length, and at the same time to correct Gibbon's statement in several particulars. And I shall be surprised if it be thought that his conduct appears to better advantage by being presented in its true light.

CHAPTER III.

GIBBON.

GIBBON was sixteen years old (he was born in 1737, the same year as Suzanne Curchod) when his father sent him to a *pension* in Lausanne, to the house of a minister, the reverend M. Pavilliard, giving special instructions that his boy should be made to abjure the errors of the Papacy into which he had let himself be drawn while he was at Oxford, and to bring him back again to the Protestant Church. Docile enough during the first few years under the strict guardianship and scanty fare which M. Pavilliard meted out to him, Gibbon afterwards complained bitterly that he was obliged to live in "a narrow, gloomy street, the most unfrequented of an unhandsome town, in an old and inconvenient house, in a small chamber ill contrived and ill furnished, which, on the approach of winter, instead of a companionable fire, must be warmed by the dull invisible heat of a stove." It was not until after two years had gone by,

during which time under the care of the pastor Pavilliard he had abjured Catholicism as easily as he had formerly abjured Protestantism under "Father Baker," that Gibbon was allowed a little liberty, and was introduced by the Pavilliards into the circle of society at Lausanne. He was then eighteen years old, and it is perhaps rather difficult to imagine what he was like at this early age of youth and elegance. A well known silhouette represents him as being stout and fat, with short legs, and his nose completely buried between two enormous cheeks. When Mme. du Deffand touched his face with her hands she thought for an instant that she had been made the victim of a practical joke. A portrait of him as he was at that age, which I am happy to be able to give, will enable us to understand what qualifications could compensate for his ugliness:—

I will touch lightly on the picture of M. G——. He has nice hair, a pretty hand, and the appearance of a man of good birth. His expression is so singular and so intelligent that I do not know any one who is like him. His face shows so much animation that you always see in it something new. Its movements, too, are so well timed that they always illustrate what he is saying. It is one of those extraordinary faces that you are never tired of looking at, of picturing to yourself, and of mimicking. He knows what amount of respect is due to ladies. His politeness is easy, but not familiar. He dances badly.[1] In

[1] Gibbon says in his *Memoir*, "As regards fencing and dancing my successes, I must confess, were very small."

a word, he has very little of the manners of a squire of dames. The variety of his mental acquirements is prodigious.

Here the picture stops, as though the painter had become suddenly embarrassed. Perhaps Suzanne Curchod (for it was to her that we owe the portrait) feared to own to herself how much interest she took in her model. It was probably at one of the meetings of the young men and young girls, one of the *réunions* of the Société du Printemps, of which he speaks in his *Memoirs*, that Gibbon first became acquainted with Suzanne Curchod. Let us first of all allow him to tell us of this meeting, and the consequences that came from it; we shall see afterwards how much of his story we can accept or reject:—

The charms of Mademoiselle Susan Curchod were embellished by the virtues and talents of the mind. . . . And in her short visits to some relations at Lausanne, the wit, the beauty, and the erudition of Mlle. Curchod were the theme of universal applause. The report of such a prodigy awakened my curiosity; I saw and loved. I found her learned without pedantry, lively in conversation, pure in sentiment, and elegant in manners; and the first sudden emotion was fortified by the habits and knowledge of a more familiar acquaintance. She permitted me to make her two or three visits at her father's house. I passed some happy days there in the mountains of Burgundy,[1] and her parents honourably encouraged the connection. In a calm retirement the gay vanity of youth no longer fluttered in her

[1] This village of Crassier is situated on the lowest slopes of the Jura; it is not in the mountains, nor is it in Burgundy.

bosom; she listened to the voice of truth and passion, and I might presume to hope that I had made some impression upon a virtuous heart. At Crassier and Lausanne I indulged my dream of felicity; but on my return to England I soon discovered that my father would not hear of this strange alliance, and that without his consent I was myself destitute and helpless. After a painful struggle I yielded to my fate; I sighed as a lover, I obeyed as a son; my wound was insensibly healed by time, absence, and the habits of a new life. My cure was accelerated by a faithful report of the tranquillity and cheerfulness of the lady herself, and my love subsided in friendship and esteem.

If we are to believe Gibbon's story all the toils and troubles of love were upon his side, and Suzanne Curchod would have felt nothing beyond the slight impression that might have touched a virtuous heart. When he got back to England his obedience to the paternal will put an end to his engagement; and while he "sighed as a lover" the young lady was taking the whole affair quietly and joyfully, and he only was suffering. We shall see from letters that I have before me that the trouble which this engagement caused to Suzanne Curchod was greater than it suited Gibbon to allow, and that the connection between them was not definitely broken off until Gibbon's second visit to Lausanne. Unfortunately all the letters that passed between Gibbon and Suzanne Curchod are not dated, and I am therefore reduced to place them in the order in which, according to the text, I presume them to have been written. I

shall begin by giving three of Gibbon's letters, written evidently during the early years of their acquaintance; and that which I have put first would seem to indicate the commencement of their correspondence:—

MADEMOISELLE,

— Well, why don't you begin your letter to Mademoiselle Curchod? You have been at your desk for the last hour, every now and then looking up at the sky as though you were thinking of something nice, and a moment afterwards breaking out into loud laughter. What is the matter with you? Don't you know what to say to her?—Stop now; you don't know anything about it (that answer was meant for myself). You will see that with such a charming creature—(you are not supposed to be present, mademoiselle, and this little bit of praise need not alarm your modesty)—you will see that I shall be able to chatter like a parrot. But blockhead that you are, do you think that an hour which you are pleased to call long is a great while in which to revel and to drink down at big draughts the happiness of being able in some way to repair the misfortune of absence, and to be allowed to converse at leisure with a person whose charms are so strong as to enthral one's mind, to put a light into one's heart, and to render the whole universe happy. But I must withdraw those last words. For that heart, that storehouse of tenderness and feeling, can only wake the happiness of one; and this fortunate mortal would be ungrateful if he envied even the greatest of kings.

I do not know if I ought to thank you for the permission you have given me to write to you. It only makes me feel too keenly how much I have lost in absenting myself from you. The joy that this occupation gives me is infinitely superior to anything else that we so falsely call pleasure. What company is there, however agreeable, that I do not leave with delight, if I go away from it to think of you, and all the more so

if I may hope that my thoughts may be permitted to reach you. But I feel what a difference there is between tracing these cold lines amidst the dust of my study and pouring out my soul at your feet, between seeing you with my eyes or only in fancy. My imagination is not of the dullest kind ; my heart, too, works actively enough, and still I have never been able to succeed, not in drawing your whole figure, but in picturing to myself even one of your looks. If but one sentiment showed itself in your eyes, by dint of obstinacy one might perhaps gather something, but the tranquillity of your soul shows a thousand different feelings which appear and disappear all in the same moment. How is it possible then to draw your picture ?

One hundred and twenty-one hours, ten minutes, and thirty-three seconds have now elapsed since the beginning of my exile. You understand what I mean. The coach starts, and Crassier is lost in the clouds. What was my condition ! Imagine to yourself an Eastern prince, cast by a sudden change of fortune from his throne into a dungeon ; who finds himself all at once deprived of his sceptre, his liberty, and his sight ; and who is surrounded by raw slaves ignorant of the soft language that we ought to use to those who are unfortunate. Or better still, (and even this comparison does not please me,) bring home to yourself the description that Milton gives of the condition of Adam when he was driven out of Paradise, and the whole world seemed to him to be one fearful waste. But Adam was less to be pitied than I was. The company of a creature who was dear to him, for whom he had sacrified everything, recompensed him for all else. With such comfort beside one, our misfortunes touch us lightly. All that consoled me in my sombre thoughts was the hope of seeing you again at Rolle, and in this expectation I indulged myself to the utmost. I was at your knees, I spoke to you of love and you were not angered. It was my imagination that invented for me this last feature, but blame it not ; my judgment instantly administered sound correction. My servant wished to draw me out of my dreams by asking me to which inn I wished to go.

"Yes," I said to him, "I shall see her with less constraint than at Geneva. They will not shut the door on me at six o'clock in the evening." I doubt if my valet made any flattering remarks on the state of my temper. I have not yet forgiven him for interrupting such delicious dreams. Picture them to yourself, mademoiselle. If you are willing to accept their favours, that is the only way to obtain them.

I could tell you of a thousand other things that happened to me on my journey. There were some crack-brained people at Rolle[1] who bored me to death with my doings at Lausanne (for which, in parenthesis, people generally think I must be mad); but it does not do to be always talking about oneself. Here is a letter, such as it is, and I shall be very glad if it seems to you to be as short as it does to me. I am aware that it does not look very neat, and that there are as many commonplace sayings as there are words scratched out.

Good-bye, mademoiselle. Please give my kindest regards to M. and to Mme. Curchod, and pay my compliments to all our friends at Borex.[2]

I have the honour to be, with most singular consideration,

Mademoiselle,

Your very humble and very obedient servant,

E. GIBBON.

The two following letters—also bearing no date—appear to relate to a period of greater intimacy. Gibbon has openly avowed his passion, and his declaration

[1] Rolle is a small town in the Canton of Vaud, on the banks of the lake, between Geneva and Lausanne. This was the birthplace of Colonel Laharpe, tutor to the Emperor Alexander, to whom he erected a statue.

[2] Borex is pronounced as though it were written Borey. It is a little town in the Canton of Vaud. In that part of Switzerland where French is spoken proper names ending in *ex* are pronounced as though they were written with *ey*. So Fernex is pronounced Ferney.

was not taken in bad part. We shall see that the second of these two letters was written but a few days after the first one :—

MADEMOISELLE,

If I were to tell you that the week I have passed without seeing you seems to me to be a century, I should be telling the truth, but that expression is far too common. I differ so favourably from other lovers that I do not wish to resemble them in my language. And you have always told me that I was an original character, a being unique in my kind, etc., etc. How can I renounce titles so glorious as these? Still, what am I to do; and how can I make you feel the dulness of my life since I parted from you at Borex? What I am about to say may give you some small idea.

I was for three weeks in the country with a most cross-grained and pious-minded woman, who excommunicated me twenty times a day because of my want of belief, but specially because I unfortunately yawned during an explanation of a passage in the Apocalypse relating, if I am not mistaken, to the fearful battle that would take place between Gog and Magog and the Antichrist. And there were there two country gentlemen, who had ruined themselves in lawsuits, and who now, because they had nothing else to do, were trying to reconcile the powers, and to divide Germany among themselves. But unfortunately, as one of these men was a Prussian and the other an Austrian, their squabbles were interminable, except when at odd moments they both agreed in abusing me for my indifference and for my listlessness. And to crown all, a bed-ridden old man, to whom I had run for protection, used to regale me with stories, no doubt very interesting, of his maladies and his ailments. During all this time it rained every day, and the library of the great man of the place was composed of books all treating of the laws and customs of the Canton of Vaud, and also of two old books on theology most conducive to inspire one with religious

feelings, if that be tantamount to sending one to sleep. Now, mademoiselle, answer me truly: ought I to have amused myself during these weeks? Well, I vow that these three weeks seemed to me but half the time that I have passed away from you.

I hardly know if I am more ill at ease when alone or in company; at all events, I am always moving from one place to another. When alone I bury myself in my thoughts, I try to work, I take up a few books, I open them, but I see nothing. I then rush out, endeavouring to escape from myself, or rather to escape from you. But you do not let go your hold so easily. I seek the society of ladies whom I am told are most captivating. Perhaps they are; but, as luck will have it, I always draw comparisons between them and you. If one of them speak to me she expects that I should answer her, that I should speak too, in my turn; but she ignores the one thing that alone can make me unclench my teeth. If she is silent, she ridicules my unhappiness, she laughs at the thought of a discountenanced philosopher, or rather at seeing the corpse of a wise man.

My only consolation, and that is worth more than all the rest, is to recall to mind the happy moments that I have spent with the most charming of women. The word has escaped me now; I did not mean it as flattery, but since it is out I am far from wishing to withdraw it. You are very handsome, and, if doubt were possible, I have just had a convincing proof of the fact. I went the other day to see an artist, a foreigner, who has been living here for some time past, and I saw there a portrait that I could have sworn was yours. As I was dreaming over it, the artist said to me: "There is something of my own invention, a creature of fantasy. I have travelled all over Europe, but I have never yet seen the woman who would dare to think herself so lovely; and I am quite sure that such a woman is not to be found." This man's belief was so strong that all my endeavours to dissuade him were fruitless.

Now then, let us see the real state of the case. So many charms have given you the right to be frivolous, haughty,

capricious, to tell ill-natured stories of others, and to be full of absurdities yourself. Had you all these faults, your admirers would have forgotten them the moment they saw you. But you are the very opposite of that which you might be. You are witty, and whatever you say gives the signal for applause. Your caprices are everywhere admired, and yet you are full of good sense. Yours is just the condition of mind that one might be proud of for its good qualities. An absolute monarch, or a pretty woman, whose head is not turned by power, must have his or her heart firmly set in the right place. But, mademoiselle, let me speak to you without figure of speech. I have always thought very highly of you, but the happy week that I spent at Crassier placed you upon a pedestal in my mind, to which you had not before attained. I then saw all the treasures of the greatest soul with which I am acquainted, in which the intellect and the passions were always in harmony, and which always showed proof of a mind satisfied with itself. There was dignity even in its banter, and personal charms in its seriousness. I both saw and heard you give proofs of the greatest accomplishments, and you were hardly aware of the power that was in you that enabled you to say and do such clever things. One can see plainly enough that your predominant sentiment is your great love for your most affectionate parents. This shows itself perpetually; and every one who comes near to you perceives how thoroughly your heart is governed by your noble feelings. Every time this thought occurs to me I am drawn far away from the objects which first gave rise to it. I am at this moment thinking of the happiness of the man, the possessor of such a heart, who finds that you return to him his marks of love, who can tell you a thousand times every day how much he loves you, and that he will ever continue to love you as long as he lives. I picture then to myself whole worlds of happiness, fanciful perhaps, but which I would not exchange for everything that admiring mortals value most highly and most substantially.

Be so kind, mademoiselle, to assure your good parents that I

shall always recollect with esteem and with gratitude the great regard that I feel for them. And I should be extremely unhappy, mademoiselle, if I thought that you doubted the most particular consideration with which I have the honour to be,

Mademoiselle,

Your very humble and very obedient servant,

GIBBON.

MADEMOISELLE,

I often think about myself, not that I imagine myself to be the all-important object in the universe; but it interests me very nearly to consider what I am, what I have been, and also what is my fate to come. Formerly, my condition was more wearisome than distressing. A fair competence, a few friends, and a certain reputation, were what I had perhaps a right to expect; but these good things, substantial though they were, were not accompanied with the power of being able to enjoy them. I lost a heart capable of great feeling, and yet I felt very little myself. And everything convinced me that the most painful sensations are not so afflicting to the soul as that void, that total inaction, in which it languishes isolated in the world, a burden upon others, and ready even to detest itself. There is a sad picture, mademoiselle. But it may give you an idea of the condition in which I have often found myself—a condition rendered all the more painful when one has not the consolation of being able to open one's mind to others. One fears to complain of evils which have no tangible existence, which seem to have come from some strange humours rather than from a heart actually borne down with its own weight. One has no resource left even with one's best friends. There are more people who think than those who feel, and they will not understand what you mean by your misfortunes.

Since I have known you, mademoiselle, everything has become changed to me. A happiness greater than that of owning a kingdom, greater even than that of philosophy itself, may await me. But also, a punishment repeated every day,

and each time aggravated by the thought of what I have lost, may fall to my lot. Socrates thanked the gods that he was born in Greece; and I too will thank them that they have ordained that I should be born in an age, and that I came into a country, in which I knew a woman whom my mind will always make me respect as the worthiest of her sex, and my heart makes me feel that she is also the most charming. "Oh!" you will say, "how serious he is; how melancholy, and how tragical. What a tiresome man he is! His letter actually makes me yawn." Well; yawn, mademoiselle, if you so feel inclined. I feel that I have deserved it. But, in justice to me, you should add: "I wish all the preachers were as fully convinced of what they say as he who is now boring me with his sermons."

I have the honour to be, with great attachment, and most particular consideration,

Mademoiselle,
Your very humble and obedient servant,
The Son of the King MOABDAR.

I do not know if my readers will share my feelings, but these letters do not convey to my mind signs of warmth or of sincerity. They appear to me to show only the dilettantism of a wit who writes a love-letter as he would a French exercise, and who uses the similes and forms of expression that he has found in a manual of rhetoric. But Gibbon did not content himself with writing to Suzanne Curchod the letters just now given to the reader, which I have reproduced accurately, even showing the faults of every kind, just as he wrote them. He was jealous that others wrote

and sent madrigals to her; he therefore addressed verses to her himself. I ought to say that the lines of which I now quote only a fragment bear no signature; but it is impossible to attribute them to any one else. In the first place, he goes very near to writing his own name in the first canto; and again because this bit of poetry is clearly the handiwork of a foreigner who knew the rules of the French language, but did not know those of French versification, and who mistook for verses a certain number of syllables ending in approximate rhymes.[1]

VERSES TO MADEMOISELLE S——

Tôt ou tard il faut aimer,
C'est en vain qu'on façonne;
Tout fléchit sous l'amour
Il n'exempte personne,
Car Gib— a succombé en ce jour
Aux attraits d'une beauté
Qui parmy les douceurs d'un tranquil silence
Régnoit sur un fauteuil une heureuse indolence (?)

Implacable pudeur, règne sur mes désirs,
Intimide ma voix, mes yeux et mes soupirs,
Puisque de mon teint abattu la sensible pâleur
Vous dira mon amour sans blesser ma pudeur.
Car je pâlis, je frémis, quand ma douleur mortelle
Me reproche en secret que j'aime une cruelle.

[1] In these verses Gibbon has, in point of fact, done no more than stitch together, without respecting the metre, lines written by Benserade, by Boileau, and others.

I will spare my readers the other couplets, for there are no less than eight more. They are all as elegant and as correct as those given; but I do not think that any one will find in them a truer ring than in the letters. But how did Suzanne Curchod answer the letters and the verses of her somewhat singular lover? In the archives at Coppet Castle there is no trace of any of the letters that she must necessarily have written to Gibbon during this first period of their friendship. Although it would seem, judging from Gibbon's own letters, that she answered him in a lively and bantering tone, we cannot doubt that she was disposed to reciprocate his feelings, which she appears to have strangely exaggerated to herself. But Gibbon did not yield to the illusion of blind fatuity in thinking that he had made "some impression on a virtuous heart." There are not many hearts, only twenty years old, virtuous or not, who can long listen to the language of love, and remain insensible, even when its ring is not altogether true. At all events, towards the end of Gibbon's stay at Lausanne his engagement with Suzanne Curchod was half recognised by her parents, and was fully recognised by herself, even though she did not publicly avow it. And yet during all this first period of love-making, the time in which slips are most likely to happen, Suzanne Curchod seems to have had a sort of presentiment

of the fate that was hanging over her. No sooner was their engagement concluded, than she had reason to distrust her lover's promises, and she wrote to him a letter of which I have unfortunately not got the original, but of which we may easily guess the tenor from Gibbon's answer:—

MADEMOISELLE,

On the fourth of January, I went away with a few friends to see the festival in honour of the kings at Fribourg. We stayed there some few days; my friends stopped for a ball, and I out of complacency remained with them. Then we went on to Berne, where we stayed until the end of the month, always intending to start the next day, and always detained by officious friends. I arrived here on the third of this month, and I find a letter from you written long before that date. As I was about to answer you I get a second letter from you, in which I am spoken of as the basest of men. For in spite of the moderation of your language I see the tone of your thoughts. I do not blame them. They would be true if your suspicions were well founded. That is my justification. I use no artifice, because I have no need of it; and because, whatever you may think, it is not in my character to do so. But now, in my turn, mademoiselle, what ought I to think of the last phrase in your letter. A more suspicious nature than mine might almost imagine that you were impatiently waiting for an avowal of my indifference, and that you would be annoyed if you did not get it. I fear lest this suspicion on my part may offend you, and I have endeavoured to check it; but you demand from me sincerity, and I do not wish to cease to be natural for the sake of being affected.

How were you able for one moment to doubt of my love and of my constancy? Have not you read my innermost thoughts

a hundred times? Did you not see in them a passion as true as it was strong? Were you not aware that your image would ever hold the first place in that heart which you now despise; and that, though surrounded by pleasures, honours, and riches, if I did not possess you I should enjoy none of them?

While you were indulging in your suspicions, fortune was preparing my fate for me. I do not dare to say she was preparing ours. I have before me a letter from my father, who has been waiting for me for a fortnight past. He allows me to return to England, and as soon as the zephyrs will favour my journey I shall start. But there is a destiny belonging only to me, and in the middle of the calm I see a storm rising. My father's letter is very kind and affectionate; he appears to be most anxious to see me again; he explains with much delight all the projects that he has prepared for me. All this makes me imagine a thousand obstacles to my happiness, and obstacles of a different nature to those of the inequality of fortune which formerly presented themselves to me.

The condition which the noblest idea of duty made you exact from me, and which the most tender feeling on my part made me agree to,—to make my residence in this country,—will with difficulty be listened to by a father, whose paternal love, and whose ambition for his son, will both be equally shocked by it. Still I do not yet abandon all hope. Love will make me eloquent. My father is anxious for my happiness, he will not therefore wish to take me away from you. My philosophy, or rather my temperament, makes me indifferent to riches. Honour is nothing to those who are not ambitious. If I know myself, I have never yet felt the strokes of this fatal passion. I had no passion other than the love of study until you made me feel that the heart had its wants as well as the mind, and that these wants consisted in a reciprocal love. I learned to love since you did not forbid me from doing so. What greater happiness could I have than to be able to tell you at each

instant how fond I am of you, and to hear you say sometimes that I did not love one who was ungrateful.

I have still a little space left. I have tried to fill it with something less serious, but my heart is overflowing. I can only repeat to you that I am, and will ever be, with most particular consideration,

Mademoiselle,

Your very humble and very obedient servant,

E. GIBBON.

LAUSANNE, 9th *February*.

Perhaps the tone of this letter was not enough to destroy the suspicions of Suzanne Curchod, for she thought it prudent to keep a copy of the answer that she wrote to Gibbon. It is from the copy that I give the text:—

If I were to tell you that your letter gave me no pleasure, I should no doubt be showing signs both of ridiculous and of affected foolishness. It is true I imagined that you had, either from caprice or from calculation, changed the sentiments which I knew you to possess for others, perhaps as suitable to your fortune as they were fatal to your happiness. This last idea suggested itself to me, less from an excessive *amour propre* than from the true feeling of the value of a heart of which you would deprive yourself by your own fault. I say your own fault, though if you sacrificed it in favour of your duty, I do not think that you would regret having done so. For I should despise you as much as I now respect you, if you were capable of doing anything,—I don't say against the commands of such an affectionate father (for to this I would never lend myself),—but if you allowed yourself to draw from him a permission which would spread a bitterness over the end of his life, and would perhaps bring down his white hairs with sorrow to the grave. And what would

happen to me—supposing all this were to come to pass—if you were afterwards troubled by feelings of remorse, and you bitterly repented of your decision. I pray I may never find myself in such a cruel situation.

As long as I thought that it was only a question of forsaking on my behalf certain ambitious ideas, which might perhaps be unpleasant to you, or giving up an increase of fortune, which indeed you do not want, the perfect confidence that I have in a kind and benevolent Providence, much more than my own self-love, ought to have made me hope that you would never regret the good things that you had lost. But you have touched a chord in my heart, the sound of which I know very well, and I do not feel inclined to make you forget that you would for my sake violate the lawful rights of nature, of love, and of duty. I do not see how, unless you can find some kind of palliative, (*quelque espèce de palliatif*,) you can dare propose to a kind and affectionate father, and to whom you owe so much, either on account of what he has already done for you, or on account of what he proposes to do ;—I say I do not see how you can dare avow to him your intention of leaving him in his old age to live with a foreign woman, whose superiority over other women exists probably only in your own imagination, and to whom you owe no kind of gratitude.

I did not think for a moment that you imagined I was waiting with impatience for an avowal of your indifference. This idea was too far removed from my heart to present itself to my mind. Adieu, Monsieur.

We may see, therefore, that from a proper notion of her own dignity, Suzanne Curchod disclaimed beforehand the idea of a marriage which would be displeasing to Gibbon's father, or which would not meet with his full approval. But at the same time it would seem that she did not admit that Gibbon's submission to his father's

wishes should cut the string which joined their two hearts; and she put her hopes in *some kind of palliative,* thinking rightly enough (for Gibbon's father was then a very old man) that such an impediment could not be everlasting. A few months after this exchange of letters, that is in the spring of 1758, Gibbon returned to England. According to his *Memoirs,* Gibbon would have us believe that on his return to England, out of filial obedience, he broke the chain that bound him to Suzanne Curchod, and that after he had been for some time in a state of wretched unhappiness, he consoled himself in learning that the "demoiselle" made up her mind easily enough on the score of his infidelity. We shall now see how far his narrative is contradicted by facts, and how far Gibbon has knowingly calumniated the girl whom he had abandoned.

During the first four years after his return to England, I do not find that Gibbon gave to his betrothed any sign that he was alive beyond sending to her his first work, *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature,* with a dedicatory epistle which I will not reprint It would be uninteresting; and the cold and embarrassed tone in which it was written, ought, one would think, to have begun to open the eyes of Suzanne Curchod. During these four years, even though he had turned his thoughts in quite a different direction (as

we see, indeed, from his *Memoirs,*) he received from her a mark of her constancy to him, of which he was no longer worthy. It was not until the middle of 1762 that he wrote to her breaking off their engagement; and I do not think that we can greatly deceive ourselves as to the affected despair in which the letter was written.

MADEMOISELLE,

I cannot begin! and yet I must. I take up my pen, I put it down, and I take it up again. You perceive at once what I am going to say. Spare me the rest. Yes, mademoiselle, I must abandon all thought of you for ever. The decree is issued; my heart wails under it. But before my duty everything else ought to give way.

As soon as I came to England my inclination and my interest both counselled me to endeavour to gain my father's affection, and to drive away the clouds which for some while past had hidden me from him. I can flatter myself that I have succeeded. His conduct towards me, his most delicate attentions, and the most substantial advantages, all convince me that it is so. When he told me that he had no other wish but to make me happy, I asked his permission to marry the woman with whom any country and any kingdom would be equal happiness, and without whom everything would be a burden to me. I now give you his answer. Marry your foreigner, and you are independent. But recollect first that you are a son and a citizen. He then spoke at length on the cruelty of leaving him, and of putting him into his grave before his time, and of the cowardice of throwing away from me all that I owed to my country. I went back into my room, and stopped there for two hours. I will not endeavour to describe to you my condition. When I came out I went straight to my father, and told him that I would devote to him all the happiness of my life.

May you, mademoiselle, be more happy than I can ever hope to be. This will always be my prayer, it will even be my consolation. Would that I could contribute towards its completion. I tremble to learn your fate; but still do not keep me in ignorance. It will be a bitter moment for me. Pray assure M and Mme. Curchod of my respect, of my regard, and of my sorrow. Adieu, mademoiselle. I shall always recollect Mlle. Curchod as the noblest and the most charming of women. May she never altogether forget a man who did not deserve the misery now forced upon him.

Adieu, mademoiselle. This letter may well appear to be strange to you, for it is the picture of my heart.

I wrote to you twice on my journey; once from a village in Lorraine and Maestricht, and another time from London. You did not get my letters; and I do not know if I ought to hope that this one will reach you.

I have the honour to be, with feelings that are the torment of my life, and a regard that nothing can alter,

Mademoiselle,

Your very humble and very obedient servant,

GIBBON.

BURITON, *August* 24th, 1762.

I do not know what answer Suzanne Curchod made to this letter; but it does not appear that at first she felt the bitterness so keenly as one might have naturally expected. It is probable enough she recollected that she had herself told Gibbon that she did not desire to be married to him against his father's wish; and, perhaps, when she found herself deceived by his protestations she still put her hope in the constancy of a love in which she herself continued to believe. And

she must have been strengthened in this hope on learning in the spring of 1763 (that is a few months after having received his last letter) that Gibbon had just come to Lausanne.

What can have been Gibbon's reason for undertaking this useless voyage, which must have brought him into the presence of the woman whom he had forsaken? In the narrative of his second stay at Lausanne, which occupies several pages in his *Memoirs*, he speaks no more of Suzanne Curchod than if she had left the country. His silence is all the more singular, inasmuch as their engagement was not completely broken off until they then saw each other; and the eyes of the deluded girl were at last opened. I do not know if it was by accident that she met Gibbon, and if the welcome with which he greeted her caused the veil to fall from her eyes, or if on the other hand she was warned by the small desire he showed to see her again; but a few days after Gibbon's arrival in Lausanne she wrote to him a letter, which from the tone of its prophetic passages shows that she might very well have lived in the age of Julia. Some people may wonder that I should publish letters so intimate and impassioned as this, and others that are to follow; but I would at once frankly answer that I do not imagine I am injuring the memory of a woman in showing her to be capable

of passion, when that passion has never led her into any slightest failing; and I think also that Suzanne Curchod will excite in us a stronger sympathy, if, instead of being cold and calculating as we might imagine, I can show her to have been a woman endowed with a warm, strong, and generous heart. This is her letter written from Geneva, where she was then staying, and which Gibbon must have received a few days after his arrival in Lausanne :—

MONSIEUR,

I blush at the application I am now going to make; I would willingly hide it from you, I would also hide it from myself Is it possible, good heavens! that an innocent heart should so far bemean itself? What a humiliation! I have had greater troubles, but never one that I have felt so keenly. I cannot help it, and in spite of myself I feel as if I had lost my head. My own peace of mind exacts that I should make this effort. And if I lose this present opportunity I shall never have another. Whenever I have had a moment's relaxation, my heart, ever ready to torment itself, has always imagined your signs of coldness to be proofs of your delicacy of feeling. For the last five years I have been indulging in this idle fancy in the most exceptional and unaccountable way; but at last, romantic as I may be, I am now convinced of my error. Upon my knees I beseech you to dissuade a maddened heart. Make a frank avowal of your complete indifference to me. I shall then be in a position to govern my own actions. Certainty will bring with it the repose for which I am anxiously longing. If you refuse me this mark of openness you will be the most contemptible of men; for God, who sees my heart, and who loves me though He so sorely tries

me; God, I say, will punish you in spite of my prayers, if there is the slightest prevarication in your answer, or if by your silence you treat carelessly my peace of mind as though it were a plaything.

If you ever disclose to any one this shameful proceeding, to no matter whom, were it to my dearest friend, the horror of my punishment would itself judge me for my fault; I should look upon it as a crime of which I had not seen all the blackness. Even now I feel it to be an act of meanness which overcomes my modesty, my past conduct, and my present feelings.

GENEVA, *30th May.*

This letter is addressed: "M. Gibbon, gentilhomme Anglais, chez M. de Mezery, à Lausanne." The seal in black wax has been broken, and everything leads me to believe that it was not a rough sketch, but the original letter, doubtless returned by Gibbon himself. It must have been after it was given back to her, that Suzanne Curchod wrote in English on the bottom of the last page words which show plainly enough that the recollection of having written the letter was painful to her sense of pride: "A thinking soul is punishment enough, and every thought draws blood."

How did Gibbon reply to this letter? The matter was, doubtless, painful to Suzanne Curchod, for she has not kept his answer. Five or six days later she wrote to him a second letter, and this may enable us to judge of the tone of his previous reply:—

MONSIEUR,

A separation of five years did not do so much to alter my feelings as what has lately taken place. I could have wished that you had written to me sooner, or that your last letter but one had been couched in a different tone. Exalted ideas, when they are supported by an appearance of virtue, may lead one into great errors. You might well have spared me five or six that are now irreparable, and which will for ever determine my lot in this life. I know as well as you that what I am now saying may appear to be neither delicate nor kind-hearted. For a long time past I have lost my self-control, but I am pleased to find that I still have enough left to me to feel the bitterness with which I now reproach you. I would, at the same time, ask your pardon, and beg that you do not distress yourself at the unhappiness of my condition. My father and mother are dead; what chance can hope offer to me? It was not to you that I sacrificed my hope, but to an imaginary creature who never existed but in a mind such as mine, crack-brained with romance. For as soon as your letter undeceived me you were then to me no more than any other man; and after having been the only one for whom I could feel attachment, you became one of those for whom I had the least inclination, because you are the most unlike my *beau-idéal* of a sentimental lover. And you are the only one who can recompense me. Carry out your plans of which you have given me the outlines. Join your friendship to that which my other friends have professed for me. You will find me as open-hearted, as kind, and at the same time as indifferent to you as I am towards them. You may believe me when I say that it is not petulance that makes me speak in this way; if I make use of this last term (no matter how true it be), it is only to assure you that my heart in the end will save yours. My conduct and my sentiments have deserved your esteem and your friendship. Let me reckon upon the one and upon the other, so that henceforward there be no further question of our late intimacy. I will now add a few words, as to which I beg you will give me an answer.

Life here has become very disagreeable to me since the death of my father and mother, and the kind wishes of my friends recommend me to go away. I cannot accept without meanness, nor can I refuse without ingratitude. I had thought of going to England, and offers were made to me to this effect. But people give such very different accounts of the position of a lady's companion, and of the manner of your countrymen, that I am in doubt between London and a German court. Your decision may have influence with me, and I can rely upon your judgment as well as upon your good taste.

Soon after your book was published I committed to paper a few ideas which it suggested to me. I venture to send them to you, as the first proof of my friendship. I shall not think it my duty to send you the others, for I should like to speak with you verbally. I hope, therefore, you will come to Geneva to justify the praises which I have given on your behalf.

I am told that many English people are leaving Paris for Môtiers.[1] If this is the reason that is bringing you into my part of the world, and you would like to have a letter for Rousseau, pray let me know. My nearest friends are also very intimate with him; and you will infinitely oblige me by putting to the test the sincere esteem I have for you, and my admiration for your talents.

GENEVA, *4th June.*

In spite of the just cause for the bitterness which shows itself plainly enough in this letter, we may remark that Suzanne Curchod avoids saying anything which would show that she wished her former friendship with Gibbon should altogether cease. She proposes that their

[1] Môtiers Travers, a small Swiss town situated in the Val de Travers, about thirteen or fourteen English miles distant from Neuchatel, and celebrated because Rousseau had once lived there. It was there that he wrote his *Lettres de la Montagne.*

engagement of marriage, which had once existed, should become exchanged for one of sound friendship, and she asks him for advice as to her future conduct. I am inclined to suspect that she had not quite lost all hope of recovering the wayward heart, and that her hopes chiefly lay in Gibbon's visit to Rousseau, to bring about which she had offered to him her assistance. One of her best friends, the pasteur Moultou (whose name will again frequently come before us), was intimately acquainted with Rousseau, and he also had thought of asking Rousseau to use his influence with Gibbon. He wrote to Suzanne Curchod to let her know what he had done :—

Monday.

. . . R. received a letter from Paris yesterday from Mme. la Marquise de Vernei, in which that lady said that a great many English were leaving Paris for Môtiers. She adds, *if Mr. Gibbon be one of them, bid him welcome, for he is a gentleman of good position, and a very highly instructed man.* Thereupon (pardon me, my pretty creature) I told your story to Rousseau. This interested him very much, for he had already a great regard for you, and he is very fond of anything at all romantic. He promised me that if Gibbon came he would not fail to speak of you, and he said that everything should be to your credit. Oh! if the men were as constant as the women; but then all women are not like you. Good-bye, my dear mademoiselle. I love you as much as I respect you. If you answer me, let your letter be simple and nicely written, so that I may show it to R. Send your letter to my father, so that he may frank it together with one of his own.

Suzanne Curchod made no objection to Moultou's proposition, and a few days afterwards she received from him another letter:—

Tuesday.

Let me beg of you, my dear friend, not to worry yourself; you are torturing me. If this man is worthy of you he will come back again. If he is a heartless fellow, let him alone; his loss is not worth while your troubling yourself about him. I shall go to Lausanne, and I will not see him. As my mind is not so heated as yours, you will perhaps allow that I am a better judge of what is prudent. I have insisted on this very strongly in speaking to Rousseau, and I have just written to him again. He is very sympathetic, and is altogether disposed in your favour. He will therefore manage matters much better than I can, so that my not seeing Gibbon cannot be injurious to you. I give you now an extract of the letter I wrote to him: [1]

"You ought to have got two letters for me, from Mlle. Curchod and from M. Lesage. My father writes me word that he sent them to you unsealed, no doubt with the intention that you should read them. I do indeed pity poor Mlle. Curchod. She is fond of Gibbon; she has refused very good offers for his sake; and now he has come to Lausanne, cold, apathetic, and as much cured of his old love as Mlle. C. is still wrapped up in it. She wrote me a letter which made my heart bleed. You will pity her, for you know the pangs of the heart. You may be useful to her, and you will not neglect to do for her anything you can. An Englishman who fancies himself in love with this charming girl —a man who has not even got the power of loving—has endeavoured to turn Gibbon against her by trying to make her appear ridiculous. Would you, therefore, be so kind as to speak of her as a girl whose knowledge and natural abilities, but still more

[1] This letter which Moultou wrote to Rousseau, is published in the first volume of a book entitled: *Rousseau, ses amis et ses ennemis.*

her niceness of disposition, are well known in Geneva. My good friend, I can assure you that I know of nothing so pure or so heavenly as her heart; and because I wish that she would always remain in England you may be sure that I am judging her impartially. Praise such as this coming from you must have its due effect, and every word of it is perfectly true. You are not supposed to know anything of what has passed between her and Mr. Gibbon. I am told that he intends to go to see you very shortly."

This is, dear mademoiselle, what I have written to Rousseau. You may trust him. No man has so much high feeling. I added at the end of my letter: "Farewell, my good friend; be kind to me and do not forget Mlle. Curchod."

After a silence of three weeks Gibbon wrote as follows:—

LAUSANNE, 23*rd June*, 1763.

MADEMOISELLE,

Must you still continue to offer me happiness which prudence compels me to refuse. I have lost your affection, though I still possess your friendship. In giving me that you do me so much honour that I have no room left for doubt. I accept it, mademoiselle, as a valuable exchange for mine which is most perfectly yours, and as a treasure whose value I know so well that I can never part with it. But of our correspondence, mademoiselle, if I feel all its pleasures, I perceive also all the dangers. I feel this as regards myself, and I fear for both of us. Pray let my silence protect me. Excuse my fears, mademoiselle; I think they are not unfounded.

In any important matter you will always find me to be a friend who asks to show his friendship as though he were asking for a favour. I wish I could enlighten you as to the question you put to me. The position of a lady's companion in England is very uncertain, as indeed it is everywhere. It will depend upon the character of the persons with whom one lives. But, mademoiselle, you ought to have every reason to hope for good fortune.

It would be impossible to any one to refuse you their good will, and very difficult not to show you friendship.

My desire to read, so as to do justice to it, the valuable compliment with which you have honoured me, has delayed my writing to you sooner. Its intrinsic merit and the pleasure of feeling this sign of your kind recollection of me imposed a silence upon paternal affection; and an author (perhaps for the first time) found much satisfaction in reading a criticism upon his first work. I admired the fairness of a great many of your remarks; and I observed that in every case in which you were right, it was because you had used your mind to good purpose, and if you were sometimes wrong it was because you had not sufficiently used your eyes.

I have the honour to be, with great consideration,

Mademoiselle,

Your very humble, and very obedient servant.

(*Sic.*) DE GIBBON.

It was thus that Gibbon wrote to a woman whom he had once loved. Though he assures her that in every important matter she may always depend upon him, he pleads silence as an excuse for screening himself from a friendship in which he affects to foresee a danger for his own peace of mind. On the other hand, the intervention of Rousseau, whom Gibbon did not see, was not successful; and when Moultou told the whole story to Rousseau, the philosopher passed upon the hero of the romance this severe judgment: "You give me a commission on Mlle. Curchod's behalf which I shall acquit badly for the very reason that I have a strong regard for her. Mr. Gibbon's coldness makes me think poorly of him.

I have again read his book (the *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature*). He tries to be witty, but he is forced and unnatural. Mr. Gibbon is not my man, and I do not think that he would suit Mlle. Curchod. Whoever does not feel her value is not worthy of her; but he who has been able to feel it and has then refused it is contemptible." In his *Memoirs*, Gibbon has endeavoured in vain to protest against the harshness of this condemnation, but after reading his last letter we are not much disposed to differ from Rousseau very materially.

Gibbon's last letter must have dispelled any doubts from the mind of Suzanne Curchod. But she maintained a strict silence until she met him one day by chance at Ferney, probably at one of those dramatic performances to which Voltaire, in spite of the Venerable Consistory, used to delight in inviting people both from Geneva and from Lausanne. That evening Gibbon so insulted her by his disdainful manner that at last her anger fairly boiled over. The next day she wrote to him a last letter, which, long as it is, I shall publish entire, because she there shows quite clearly both Gibbon's conduct and also her own :—

MONSIEUR,

I owe it to my own happiness to make a few explanations which my *amour propre* vainly endeavours to refuse to me.

If I could hope or fear that I should never see you again I should then compel myself to be silent. But I am immediately going away to Montélimart, and perhaps you will have left this country before I return.

At Ferney I was so bewildered and so much overcome by the constant strain of enforced pleasure, and also by the harshness of your answers, that my tongue absolutely refused to obey me. You assured me in other words that you blushed for me because of my conduct. Sir, I have never confounded that which honesty demands with the dictates of self-love. You have sometimes taught me to forget the one; as regards the other . . . you are not a dishonest man, and who would be mean enough to dare to accuse me of having ever violated it? But let me recall to your mind my conduct which you appear to think so reprehensible. At the time when I first saw you I was the joy of both my father and mother; my father was destroying his health to make provision for me, and the thought of this damped all my happiness. I wished to lessen his troubles, but my parents, deluded as to my personal qualities, could not bring themselves to listen to propositions, which were honest though not very brilliant, or to resolve to part with the only object of their affection. My innermost wishes were the same as theirs; before I saw you I cared for no one but for them. Imbued with this spirit of virtue which I saw displayed, I conceived to myself an imaginary model; I thought that you came up to it. And what did you not do to convince me? "All your homage was given to me, and to me only; it would be impossible that you should change your mind. You would be gentle with me; you would be only too happy to humour my sensitiveness,"—which you have since treated so unkindly. In this way I was easily deceived. My misguided passion filled me with the most affectionate feelings. The thoughts in my heart gave tone to everything that passed through my mind. What visions did I not picture to myself! My father and mother could not live for ever; and this idea, which up to that time had filled me with

horror, became somewhat softened when I thought I had found one, so noble as to embrace all my sympathies, and so tender as to dry my tears. But instead it is he who has made my pains harder for me to bear. Sir, I would have you remember the offers which you so often made to me : I could marry you without your father's consent. I refused to listen to this proposition ; and would refuse to listen to it down to my last breath. I had one cause for uneasiness. You were rich, you might suspect me of being ambitious of wealth. M. de Montplaisir gave me the opportunity of proving to you the contrary ; and in a conversation that we had together upon this matter, my mind full of what was then going on, I told you of all the offers that this gentleman had made to me. You then surprised me very much by making me offers of marriage as valid as his. I was quite confounded by your answers, and if I had not been altogether blind I should have seen how wide a difference there was in our personal sentiments. M. de M. gained the good wishes of my father ; he asked for me as a favour but did not wish to constrain my wishes. I saw that he was old and poor, and I thought that I ought to sacrifice everything to filial affection. You then went away, and you wrote to me saying that your father had refused his consent to our marriage. I afterwards became very dangerously ill ; my father and mother were so much annoyed that they no longer put any restraint upon my inclinations. What did I not write to you ? At last you answered me, and in the words I have underlined, I thought I saw stronger proofs of your delicacy of thought. You knew what had taken place between Mont. . . and myself and you refrained from asking me to remain here until you were your own master. The idea that you were sacrificing your happiness to mine made me imagine that you also thought so. I wished to relieve your pretended uneasiness as to my future position, and I wrote to you giving you details of some chances of good fortune which seemed to be in prospect for my dear parents, and which also made my mind more easy in case of determined opposition. Your silence only

made me think more highly of you; thus I reasoned with myself because an idea of perfection had then filled my mind. After I had become convalescent I went to Lausanne. If you have been told that I listened for a single moment to M. d'Eyverdun,[1] I have letters of his that will acquit me from the charge; you know his handwriting, you may look over them. During my father's lifetime I kept up a close correspondence with M. de Mont. . . But what was my grief, when in the most critical moment of my life, you, on whom all my hopes rested, abandoned me to all the horror of despair, and then this man whom I had despised . . . and others whom I hardly knew. . . . But I cannot make this hateful comparison, I am still too weak to think about it.

Carried away by the thoughts which had been prompted by your conduct towards me, and by the situation of my good and kind mother, I submitted to my fate. And when everything had been arranged, I became refractory just at the last moment upon a pretext that was plausible enough, as I can show by a collection of letters. My heart, ever ready to justify you, led me to imagine a wearisome and dreary kind of life, but one which would amply provide for the maintenance of my dear mother. I led this kind of life for three years, and, advised by one who was devotedly attached to me, every act of your conduct confirmed me in my opinion and helped me to bear my lot. If during those three years I did not win the good opinion of every one in Geneva, if my mother did not shed tears of joy at the marks of respect that were shown to me, if I did not turn my back upon every proposition of marriage and all the assiduities of kind-hearted gentlemen, I may then confess that I have reason to blush.

I cannot speak so strongly of the short stays made at Lausanne; I went there merely for the purpose of relaxation. The pleasure of being away from lessons and from drudgery,

[1] D'Eyverdun's name often recurs in Gibbon's *Memoirs*, and he afterwards became one of Gibbon's most intimate friends.

and especially the inexpressible happiness, unknown to me during my father's lifetime, of having my mother close by me in all my pleasures that she might see the small triumphs of my self-love—everything, I say, brought upon me the jealousy of women and the remarks of men to whom I was perfectly indifferent. But if among the men whom I liked there can be found one who has effaced you from my heart I will then confess that I should have cause to blush were I by your side. Have you heard any idle tales? I flatter myself that you know me too well to allow yourself to believe in mere gossip. There are, however, two things that may make me uneasy. A miniature portrait taken without my knowledge by an artist of whose existence I was quite ignorant, and five or six verses snatched from me in jest—all of which I can prove to have been nothing more than playfulness—and which also will show the thoughts that were then foremost in my mind. But, no; these two things are in the hands of a man incapable of baseness or of theft. And why should I look about for a reason which is otherwise too well known to me? What is left to me now but to thank upon my knees the Supreme Being who has delivered me from the greatest of misfortunes. Yes; I now begin to see that you would have moaned over my existence. I should have been prejudicial to your hopes of fortune and your ambition, and your ill-disguised sorrow would have killed me with despair. Why should I blush to have written to you, hard-hearted man, whom I once thought to be so kind and so considerate? What did I ask of you? Your father is still alive, and my convictions are unconquerable. What did I want, then? To cling to the last bit of sensibility that was left in me. All nature was, as it were, dead to me; must I therefore see it disfigured and distorted? I repeat, sir, that any heart which has once known mine and has ceased for one moment to cherish it was not worthy of possessing it, and could never have my esteem. If I have ever spoken or written differently, I now blush to own it. It would be the result of some unaccountable thought, of a listlessness and indifference to

F 2

anger, and of the repugnance that one always feels in destroying one's most cherished hopes. My conduct, you say, belies my words. In what, I ask? I am acting towards you as towards an honest man of the world who is incapable of breaking his word, but who has been amusing himself in tearing open my heart by the most nicely contrived and best regulated schemes of torture. I do not now threaten you with celestial anger—an expression that once escaped me; but without having the gift of prophecy I may assure you that you will one day regret your irreparable loss in discarding for ever the too honest and the too loving heart of

S. C.

GENEVA, 21*st September*.

When Suzanne Curchod wrote this haughty and impassioned letter she little thought that she would ever write to Gibbon again. But time, which laughs at all things, does not grant eternity to anger any more than to love. We must confess that this terrible avenger brings with it its consolations and its pleasures. Sometimes it happens that when one is resigned to ask of life the fewest favours she is most disposed to bestow them freely. I ought now to bring to a close the chapter of a story of which the calm and peaceful ending was so dissimilar to the threatening aspect which it wore at the commencement. Two years later, on his way through Paris, Gibbon found Suzanne Curchod married, and he himself sought an interview which must have been somewhat embarrassing to both parties. Narrating this meeting in one of his letters

to Lord Sheffield, Gibbon bewails himself on his position with much of the self-conceit of bad taste, because of the impertinent security of M. Necker, who, after he had made him stay for supper, went quietly to bed, leaving him *tête-à-tête* with his wife. "It is," Gibbon says, "making an old lover of mighty little consequence." On the other hand, in a letter to one of her female friends in Switzerland, Mme. Necker admits that "her feminine vanity never had such a complete and honourable triumph as in seeing him who had refused her come by her side calm, submissive, humble, decent even to modesty, a constant witness of her husband's kindness to her, and a man who was an ardent worshipper of riches." [1]

There was in point of fact a certain bitterness felt on both sides; the quarrel had been so recent that it could not well be otherwise. But time again performed its kindly office. M. and Mme. Necker went for a short

[1] This letter may be seen in a little volume, published by Count Féodor Golowkin: *Lettres diverses recueillies en Suisse*, and from which I shall borrow a few passages. Count Féodor Golowkin was a Russian nobleman who, exiled during the reign of the Czarina Elizabeth, sought and found a home in the Canton of Vaud, where he possessed some property. When he was at liberty to return to Russia under Catherine II., he preferred his adopted country to the land of his birth. At a later date Gibbon became acquainted with him in Lausanne. In his *Memoirs* Gibbon says: "He is generally supposed to be a man of wit; it may be that his friends are witty." Count Golowkin lived to an advanced age.

while to London, where they again met Gibbon; and afterwards Gibbon made a long stay in Paris, where he much enjoyed being introduced to all the wits as a friend of M. and Mme. Necker;—both these circumstances aided to establish a friendly connection in place of the lovesuit that had once existed. A frequent and affectionate correspondence (but which was never intimate) was maintained between each interview. The greater part of this correspondence was published after Gibbon's death.[1] In the friendly letters which she wrote to her old admirer, Mme. Necker occasionally allowed herself the pleasure of recalling to mind, under the cover of some discreet allusion, a past event over which time was ever gradually throwing the veil of oblivion. When he sent to her the first volume of his history she wrote to thank him: "You are reckoning, in spite of yourself, among your readers, as many women as men. I say, in spite of yourself, for you know you have ill-treated them. You think that all their good qualities are artificial. Are you sure, sir, that you are in a position to talk in this way?" Even after such a length of time the feminine love of raillery was not altogether quenched, for hearing that Gibbon had had some feeble desire of marrying, she

[1] It may be seen in the five volumes entitled: *Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works*, ed. 1814.

wrote to him: "Beware of creating for yourself such a bond in the latter half of your life. The marriage which makes two people happy in their mature age is that which they had contracted when they were young. It is only in that way that the knot can become perfectly tied: tastes become reciprocal, the feelings of each grow to be the same, ideas become common, the intellectual faculties graft themselves one upon the other, one's whole existence has its double, and life is but a prolongation of youth." This seems to be tantamount to saying to him: "You ought to have taken me when I was young; it is too late for you now to make yourself happy."

As regards Gibbon's letters, I always feel them to be a little heavy, as though in writing he was not quite at ease; he may perhaps have found it difficult to descend from the style of the grave historian to that of the playful letter-writer. I have in my possession a few of his letters, hitherto unpublished, and from them I will select the following, which he sent together with the second and third volume of his *History*:—

After a three years' silence, I make bold, madam, to send you a letter of thirteen hundred pages—the second and the third volume of my *History*, which you will receive by post, the parcel being addressed to M. Necker. But what am I to say for my long, my strange, and my unpardonable silence? I dread your

reproaches ; but I dread far more the cold and polished indifference which easily forgives the faults of a forgotten guilty person. The culprit is far from excusing his conduct, he cannot even account for it; and if it were allowed to him to place himself in the position of an impartial person behind the scenes, he would search in vain for the causes of a moral phenomenon, as to which he would still doubt if he were not too well assured of its reality. *Idleness?* A man has not been able to write a letter of two pages, for which his own thoughts would have supplied him with superabundant matter; but he has filled two printed quarto volumes; and the getting together of the materials, the scaffoldings, and the subterranean passages have cost him more time and labour than the actual building itself. *The rush of amusements or of business?* Wretched and miserable excuse. The man who is both a Secretary of State and a coxcomb, who is made welcome in every house, has always moments to himself; and I, who, thank God, am neither one nor the other, I often think how much time I have lost in regrets, in being remorseful, and in making resolutions, when I could at once have asked for and have obtained my pardon. *Forgetfulness or indifference?* I utter these words with sorrow ; but I am sufficiently punished by the thought that my conduct may have laid me open to a reproach which my heart alone can contradict. No, madam, I shall never forget the sweetest moments of my youth; and to these pure and indelible recollections is now joined the truest and most unalterable friendship. After a long separation I had the happiness of being able to spend six months in your company. The feelings of respect and of gratitude which I owed to you grew stronger every day, and I left Paris with the strong but idle resolution always to keep up a correspondence which alone could repay me for what I had lost. . . . I recollect, madam, you asked me one day if, in this volume, any mention was made of celebrated women. There was one woman (vol. iii. p. 318) in whom I took a deep interest on account of a likeness to which you only can lay claim. In the eighteenth century, as well as

in the fifth, fortune may choose out from obscurity a rare mixture of beauty, of virtue, and of talent, to set it on a throne or upon the steps of a throne, but she has small command over one whom she could not conquer in times of adversity nor corrupt by the bestowal of her favours. She might banish our modern Athenäis into the solitude of Jerusalem or of Coppet, but I defy her to tarnish her honour or to disturb her peace of mind. . . .

If I am not quite forgotten in Paris, would you, madam, do me the favour to assure those from whom I received hospitality, that they did not show their kindness to one who was ungrateful. . . . . If Mlle. Necker is not an accomplished young lady, nature, education, and example are powerless.

I have the honour to be, with the most respectful devotion,

Madam,

Your very humble and very obedient servant,

E. Gibbon.

As she read this letter Mme. Necker may have remarked to herself that the regrets felt by Gibbon were fulfilling the prophecy which she had put forth at the end of the last letter that she wrote to him before her marriage; unless indeed she had totally forgotten what she had previously said. In spite of Gibbon's assurances I cannot altogether believe that he attached very much importance to a friendship which he allowed to grow slack by such long intervals of silence. And this friendship might have become a thing of the past if chance had not again brought Gibbon and Mme. Necker together, in a place not very far distant from where they had first met. We all know that Gibbon frequently made long stays at Lausanne, and that he there

wrote the last chapter of his *History*. M. and Mme. Necker, too, used often to visit the banks of the Lake of Geneva, their own inclinations making them both fond of a place which brought back to their minds such pleasant and happy recollections. They had once before met Gibbon at Geneva; and Mme. Necker, who had kept a lively reminiscence of this common meeting ground did not wish that her joys should lie buried in the depths of her own thoughts. At a later date she wrote to Gibbon from Coppet:—

> I felt during all this time a sentiment that was then new to me; perhaps it would also be new to many other people. By a rare gift of providence, I was uniting in my own thoughts one of the sweet and pure affections of my youth, and also that which is now my lot upon earth, and which makes it so well worthy of envy. This singularity, joined to the pleasures of easy and unaffected conversation, produced upon me a feeling of enchantment, and the connection between the past and the present made all my existence appear like a dream, that went out from a gate of ivory to console poor human mortals. Will you not help us to prolong it?

Gibbon could not remain insensible to such an affectionate appeal. He stayed at Coppet several times, and was there in the month of October, 1790,—immediately after M. Necker's second retirement from office. More than thirty years had then elapsed, since, in the garden of the parsonage, not six miles distant, the young student had first met the daughter of the minister of

Crassier. Time, which had separated them, had again brought them together, and had given honours to the one, and to the other the fame and the dignity of high social position; but, however brilliant may have been the gleams which the strong halo of youth sheds upon its happy days, I do not think that either regretted that which was past and gone. As Mme. Necker and Gibbon were walking together under the trees in the park at Coppet, she may well have said to herself that the serenity and the gentle warmth of autumn days brings with it a softer glow than the hot and unequal bursts of early spring.

CHAPTER IV.

DEATH OF M. AND MME. CURCHOD—MME. DE VERMENOUX —DEPARTURE FOR PARIS—M. NECKER—MARRIAGE.

LET us now go back a little, to the girlhood of Suzanne Curchod, at first so happy, and afterwards tried by such cruel misfortunes. During the years of expectation and of anxiety caused by Gibbon's hesitation and his backwardness every sort of unhappiness came upon her. Her father died suddenly in the month of January, 1760. She lost in him more than the learned instructor of her younger days, for the small emolument which M. Curchod received as minister of Crassier was almost the only resource of the family. At his death his widow and his daughter were reduced nearly to indigence. They had to leave the parsonage, for the new occupant came to take possession, and live upon the modest pension allowed to the widow of the late minister. Suzanne Curchod at once resolved to turn to good account the sound

instruction which she had used hitherto only as a means of demanding admiration from gentlemen. The lady president of the *Académie de la Poudrière* determined to give lessons. According to a tradition which still runs in the Canton of Vaud, but of which I can find no trace in the papers at Coppet, Suzanne Curchod, mounted upon a small donkey (I am disposed to think that it at any rate was upon the old horse *Grison*), used to ride out to those of her pupils who lived in the outskirts of Lausanne. She was a girl proud and susceptible. It may be that the people in the Bourg quarter of the town did not sufficiently consider the self-love of the governess whom they had once welcomed as their friend; it may be that the new mode of life which necessity had forced upon her was harder to bear than she had at first imagined; but if we believe her own words the trials which she had to undergo altered her disposition and marred the softness of intercourse between her and her mother. After three years of precarious existence Mme. Curchod died from an illness that had been much aggravated by pain. At her death Suzanne was overcome with fits of melancholy and of despair, for she reproached herself for having by her petulance destroyed the peace of her mother's last years. Long afterwards, in one of her journals where she used to write down and pour forth all her thoughts,

she expressed in the impassioned language which was peculiar to her nature all the bitterness of her remorse.

Oh! mother, whose pure and living soul is now wandering close round about me, dearest image, ever present to my disconsolate heart, you who were to me an example of every sacrifice, why have I returned to that ungrateful country from which you dragged yourself away? You were the victim of passion, I am a victim to dull insensibility. They have wounded cruelly the heart that once so fondly loved you. I seek in vain to confide my sorrows, but who will hear me? I try to recall you in my dreams; I think I see you; I speak to you; I lay myself on your heart--a mother's breast! but where is it? Oh God! I seek to deceive myself, for it seems that these lines, these words I am now writing, will one day reach you. Dear mother, do not refuse your child. She has been guilty; but has not time and tears and deep-loving affection yet made amends for those moments of ill-humour? I take you to be my witness, did I once, in however light a way, wrong you in that lonely spot where my childhood was passed? And in those three years, when my mind became distorted, I did not for one single hour cease to love you. Pardon me, then, have mercy on me. The heavenly Father, pardons those who have offended Him. Are not seventeen years of self-reproach sufficient to expiate my fault? Look at my tears, which fall from me in torrents, and take back your child. Do not drive her from you,—she asks for pity. Your shadow is her resting-place on this earth, for she feels that this invisible shadow can alone close her eyes. Examine my conduct; have I not done all that you desired of me? No, I have never sinned against the God whom we adore, except when I sinned against you; and in my anger, alas! I was hot against you because you were the source of all my happiness upon earth; I held you accountable for all the misadventures of my life, because I was dependent on you for all my enjoyments. But whatever may have been the cause for this criminal ill-

humour, since it was offered only to you, my guardian angel, regard not those actions in which my heart bore no part; see what has been my despair since you went from me; look at the torment which has afflicted me, and to which I am still a prey. The savages who envied me those happy moments in which the hope of comforting you in your last years gave me the strength to trample under foot mortifications of every kind, did not know all the wounds they were about to open.

I think that the wrongs of which Suzanne Curchod might have had to repent were afterwards strangely exaggerated by her own imagination, which, as we shall see, was always ready to torment her. Every letter that she then received shows proof of the anxious cares she bestowed upon her mother. One of her relations wrote to her:—

I am not surprised, my dear cousin, that your kind friend, Mlle. Reverdil, should write to me telling me of your deep sorrow, and also saying how great is your present unhappiness, when I think of the separation which death has placed between you and your dear mother, and of the short time allowed to you to prepare yourself. I know the sensitiveness of your nature, and also the goodness of your heart. I knew of your affection for your mother, your attachment towards her, the pleasure you had in seeing her happy, and in adding to the comforts of her life. You were each sure of the other's friendship; it seemed to you as if this friendship were to last for ever. And then to have it all so suddenly torn away from you is heart-breaking to one of your strong loving nature. It is, as it were giving your own heart's blood.

But after her mother's death, Suzanne Curchod's situation became still more painful. The mother's

small income gave them quite as much assistance as the money earned by the daughter in giving lessons, and when this resource was suddenly withdrawn from her Suzanne was reduced to earn her bread by means of a profession that had become very distasteful to her. The future wife of a *contrôleur-général des finances* might perhaps have learnt what were the horrors of poverty, if good friends had not come to her assistance. It was afterwards the pride and the great pleasure ot her life to implant strong affections in the minds of some chosen few, and when troubles came upon others she was ever ready to give her help in the case of need. Among those who were kind to Suzanne Curchod, I will first mention a lady with whom she was in no way connected, and who was widely separated from her by all the honours of rank and fortune. The Duchesse d'Enville,[1] like many other French ladies, went to Geneva with the idea of consulting the famous Dr. Tronchin,[2] and then, either for reasons of health or because she liked the country, she took up

[1] Marie Louise Nicole de la Rochefoucauld, born in 1716, died in 1796. She married her cousin Louis Frédéric de la Rochefoucauld, Duc d'Enville or Anville, lieutenant-general in the king's navy.

[2] Théodore Tronchin, born at Geneva in 1709, died in 1781, was a friend of Voltaire's, and was also his physician ; Voltaire used to call him Apollo Tronchin. He lived for many years in Paris, where he was the fashionable doctor among women and men of letters. He contributed much to popularise inoculation in France.

her abode for some time on the banks of the lake. The Duchesse d'Enville was one of those who belonged to the old society, and who liked to feel that they were liberal minded, and open to receive new ideas. While she was soliciting—though I do not know for what purpose—the townsfolk of Geneva, she caused her own daughters to be inoculated (this was then thought to be a sign of great boldness), and shut herself up with them until all fear of infection was gone. At her house all the wits who lived on the banks of the lake used to meet and see each other. Voltaire was among her guests. She also went to see him at Ferney, and gave him her cordial assistance in his efforts to get the decree reversed that had been passed upon Calas and his family, and to obtain a free entry of the Protestants into France. Voltaire has frequently mentioned her in his correspondence. He speaks of her "great desire for doing good." She had shown herself eager to become acquainted with Mlle. Curchod for she had been moved to pity at her unfortunate situation; and she thought also that the girl's society and companionship would be beneficial to her own daughters. She had used her influence with M. d'Erlach, the magistrate at Berne, to raise the pension paid to Madame Curchod; and after her death she laboured very hard to obtain a restitution of the

property which the Albert de Nasse family had owned in France, but which had since been confiscated. She was thus giving proof of an intelligent and active sympathy towards a poor and an unknown girl, and it would seem that she wished to try to make her forget the debt of obligation for her own kindness. I cannot refuse myself the pleasure of giving a letter of this good woman's, which will show both the generosity of her disposition and also that exquisite politeness of bygone days which sought to remove distances rather than make them too plainly visible :—

A severe inflammation which has given me much pain has prevented me, mademoiselle, from expressing to you sooner how much I feel for you in your unhappy situation, and also my great desire to try and lessen your troubles. I have not yet received an answer from M. d'Erlac. If you wish that I should write to him again, M. Moultou or M. Lesage has only to tell me so. I am very much pleased at the kind way in which you speak of me ; I would wish all my friends to think well of me. My children bid me say that they are sincerely sorry for your misfortunes. You may speak of me sometimes to the clergyman and to the philosopher ; I should be sorry to be quite forgotten. Believe me, mademoiselle, that no one is more truly than I am your very humble and very obedient servant,

La Rochefoucauld D'Enville.

The affectionate assistance shown by the Duchesse d'Enville was not the only kindness extended to

Suzanne Curchod in these years of trouble before her marriage. She also found a real and true male friend—a rare and happy circumstance in a woman's life. I have already alluded to the pasteur Moultou, a name well known to the readers of Voltaire and of Rousseau; and a man who had the singular good fortune to preserve the friendship of both. Moultou was the son of a refugee who came from the south of France; and he married a daughter of the pasteur Cayla, a friend and a colleague of Suzanne Curchod's father. The daughters of the two ministers had been close friends, and Moultou was soon admitted into the Curchod family on terms of intimate friendship. In point of fact, I am inclined to believe that before his marriage Moultou was not altogether insensible to the attractions of Suzanne, and that the honest affection which he retained for her all through his life had been preceded by a different sentiment. "I have been very fond of you, mademoiselle," he once wrote to her, "and I am fond of you still. I think I shall always love you. But this friendship, which is the cause of my happiness, can hardly add to your enjoyment." And in another letter: "I ought, my dear friend, for once, to explain myself to you, and yet any explanation must be unnecessary. You have always thought that there was one person in the world for whom I had more friendship than for you. But you

have not looked well into my breast. Other sentiments may have deceived you; but of those sentiments I am ignorant. I ought to be ignorant of them; they ought to be concealed from every one, especially from those who first created them in my heart. Those sentiments which might have made my life unhappy have given to it its greatest charm, when I saw them under the colour of friendship. Burn my letter, then, and do not wrong me again. The place you hold in my heart is as immovable as my affection for you is holy. I shall always be the same towards you; and even death, I hope, will not quite close a friendship which will have given to me one of the greatest joys of my life."

She whom Moultou in his letter calls "his dear friend" did not rest satisfied with mere affectionate protestations. Their correspondence, lasting for nearly thirty years, and which was not terminated until Moultou's death, might now cause us some astonishment because of the strong terms in which they each show their feelings one for the other, if we did not know that such were the manners of the age, and that it was then customary to express the most honest affections in impassioned and high-flowing language. In the early days of their acquaintance Suzanne Curchod had published, in a collection of small pieces then being printed in Switzerland, "a portrait of her friend;" and at a later

date M. Necker inserted the same sketch when he published his wife's collected works. After saying that his features were neither masculine nor effeminate, and speaking of his soft and pleasing smile, his fine and expressive though somewhat peculiar countenance, she asks herself the rather delicate question: "Would it be better to have him for a friend or as a lover?" She answers: "In love he would be too enthusiastic. He might, perhaps, cherish only the phantom of his own imagination; and it would be hard to satisfy him, for it would be difficult to love as he loves. If M—— had loved me, I doubt whether he would have really known me; his friendship flatters me more than his love." And she concludes by exclaiming: "His is a heart wide enough to open itself to the human race, and yet narrow enough to admit of only two or three friends. Ah! I should like to be one of them."

We may imagine that, surrounded by such good friends, Suzanne Curchod was not left helpless and quite alone in the world immediately after her mother's death. The pasteur Cayla and Moultou's father, both offered to her a hospitable welcome. But those who know the high houses in the streets in the old part of Geneva, la Taconnerie, where M. Cayla lived, and le Bourg de Four where Moultou lived, will understand that their gloomy-looking walls presented to the mind

of the young girl a singularly unforbidding aspect when she compared them to the fruit gardens of Crassier, or to the terraces at Lausanne. She was in one of those painful situations in which the well founded susceptibilities of her own sense of dignity made the troubles of life all the more hard to bear. Although she still continued to give lessons to her former pupils, and though she endeavoured to bear in mind that the hospitality she received was in exchange for her work as governess to Moultou's children, yet she felt that this not very high position in a friendly house could not last for ever, and with the assistance of others she was endeavouring to find a better engagement. Two courses were open to her. She might either accept the situation of lady's companion in a foreign family; or, what she disliked much more strongly, she might have listened to any one of the propositions of marriage that were made to her, and which, let it be said to the honour of her own countrymen, were indeed numerous enough. Her correspondence at this time shows us that she was harassed by painful anxieties. At one time she is making herself acquainted with the duties and the daily life of a lady's companion, both in England and Germany, and she is almost on the point of starting for either country. At another time she appears to be listening to proposals

made to her by a well-to-do barrister at Yverdon, whom she had first met at Neuchatel, and who is beseeching her to "pronounce a judgment of blessing in his favour which he expects by the next letter-bag without further delay." But the decree was not given; and the singular conditions without which Suzanne Curchod would not consent to bind herself,—amongst others there was a stipulation that she should not be obliged to live at Yverdon with her husband for more than a third part of the year,—delayed the conclusion of a marriage contract which her friends strongly advised her to accept. Human foresight might have counselled her to make up her mind to a somewhat unromantic match, but happily for her she thought otherwise; and before long, unforeseen circumstances came to change the aspect of her affairs.

Among the women that had been attracted to Geneva or to the neighbourhood by the reputation of Dr. Tronchin, there was a French lady, a Mme. de Vermenoux. Though not more than twenty-six years old, Mme. de Vermenoux was a widow, and it would appear that she had not much reason to regret the death of her late husband. She was young, rich, witty, and light-hearted. She tried to ease her mind from the cares and troubles of ill health by making for herself a circle of gentlemen, whose society might pleasantly

occupy her thoughts. It chanced that she came to live in Moultou's house; she soon became acquainted with him, and through him with Suzanne Curchod. She was much pleased with the girl's manner, and offered to take her to Paris. In some ways this was the best offer that Suzanne had as yet received. To leave, at least for a few years, a country in which painful thoughts were always recurring to her mind, to go to Paris, the gay centre of human activity and of knowledge, opened out to the whilom President of the *Académie de la Poudrière*, a lively and a very pleasing perspective. But at the same time it warred strongly against her sense of pride to accept this equivocal position; and to overcome her hesitation, Moultou had to call to his aid all his iron strength of will, which, if we may trust to his portrait, he could use in showing his friendship for a good cause. Suzanne had no reason to regret her final decision; and I do not at all believe to be true, as it has been said, that she had to submit to much haughtiness of character from her patroness. M. Steimlen, the author of *La Vie de Bonstetten*,[1] relates that once when Mlle. Curchod

[1] Charles Victor de Bonstetten, born at Berne on the 3rd of September, 1745, died at Geneva the 3rd of February, 1832. He was the author of many works, among others *Voyage sur la Scène des six derniers Livres de l'Énéide*. In addition to his biography, written by M. Steimlen, see Sainte Beuve's *Causeries du Lundi*, vol. xiv.

came into Mme. de Vermenoux's drawing-room making a curtsy, that lady said to her in Bonstetten's presence : "Leave the room, mademoiselle, and come back again and make another curtsy; I do not wish that you should be a disgrace to me in Paris." In the very close and intimate correspondence that Suzanne Curchod kept up with Moultou, dating from her arrival in Paris in 1764,[1] I do not think that she ever ceased to speak well of the conduct of her friend. She writes :—

> The behaviour of Mme. de Vermenoux is exactly such as I would wish. She is full of attention to me in spite of her natural coldness of manner. She does all she can to please me, and she takes compassion on me in moments when my grief will show itself, in spite of all my efforts to keep it down. Even when I have seen her in ill humour, caused by the bad state of her health, I have not to submit to anything that is disagreeable. In point of fact, I am quite sure that her heart and the fairness of her mind will always be a sufficient guarantee for her head.

We see therefore that during this short period of her life, Suzanne Curchod was not troubled with the care of her sense of dignity. Her care was a much lighter one, and a few years later the recollection of it made her smile as she contrasted it with her then present situation. Mme. de Vermenoux gave her board and

[1] For the communication of this correspondence, I am indebted to the kindness of Moultou's great-grandchildren, Mme. Streckeisen-Moultou, and Mlle. Vieusseux.

lodging, but she found her own expenses for dress to be very heavy. She soon perceived that the clothes which she could wear very well in Geneva were not suitable for Paris, and that the necessity for appearing not differently from others round about her would involve her in expenses far beyond the four hundred francs a year which was then the full amount of her fortune. She wrote to Moultou :—

Instead of economising at Mme. de Vermenoux's, I fear that I shall get very far behindhand; for though she overwhelms me with presents, she makes me nevertheless incur expenses that are too heavy for my modest income. During the fifteen days since I have left Geneva I have already spent more than twelve louis in dresses, bonnets, etc. . . . It is true that she would herself pay all my expenses that are necessary in a large town such as this, but it would be despicable meanness on my part to allow it; and I would sooner live in the corner of a desert than so take advantage of the generosity of this kind woman. I have therefore made up my mind to pretend to appear rich, rather than let her squander her money upon me.

And a few days afterwards :—

I am in the greatest embarrassment. I cannot, as you very truly say, leave Mme. de Vermenoux without acquitting all the obligations that I owe to her; and to do that I must marry in spite of myself and against all my inclinations. I cannot bear to think of it; but yet I would sooner do so than continue to play my present part, for I am being ruined for things which are pitiful to think of.

The painful necessity of being obliged to marry against her own will was happily spared to her ; her

lot in life was decided by a most fortuitous circumstance. Before Mme. de Vermenoux had made the acquaintance of Suzanne Curchod on the banks of the lake of Geneva, addresses had been offered to her in Paris by a Genevese gentleman, who, after he had been engaged in the office of his fellow-countryman Vernet, had also, not long before the period of which we are now speaking, opened an important banking house, (partly with the capital advanced to him by his former patron,) bearing the name of Thelusson and Necker. Jacques Necker was the son of *spectable* [1] Louis Frédéric Necker,[2] professor of law, and who was presented with the freedom of the city of Geneva on the 28th January, 1726, "in consideration," so says the report of the Magnificent Little Council, "of his personal merit, and the manner in which he carries on his profession, which is very beneficial to the public." Jacques Necker was a little heavy in his personal appearance, but yet a man with good eyes, and a refined and agreeable face. In conversation he soon

[1] The title or qualification of *spectable* was given in Geneva to those who had followed certain of the liberal professions: among others, that of clergyman, professor, physician, and even apothecary, which in Geneva was honoured with peculiar consideration.

[2] Louis Frédéric Necker, born at Custrin in 1686, died at Geneva in 1762. He had married a Gauthier, who, through the Gallatins and the Tuderts, a family of French refugees, traced her descent to Jacques Cœur.

gave signs of a certain intellectual superiority over those who were brought into contact with him, though his reputation had not as yet extended beyond that of an able master of finance. Mme. de Vermenoux was unwilling to reject all at once an offer which flattered her feminine vanity, and yet she could not quite make up her mind to descend from an aristocratical position, which she owed to her marriage with her first husband, to become the wife of a financier. She therefore delayed giving her final answer until she had returned from her next visit to Geneva. The suitor, who had been kept waiting, lost no time in presenting himself as soon as he heard of her arrival in Paris. It was therefore when he was trying to win the hand of Mme. de Vermenoux that Suzanne Curchod first saw M. Necker. She writes to Moultou:—

> I am much pleased with Necker, both as regards the tone of his mind and his general character, and unless I am very much mistaken the lady also sees him with considerable satisfaction. But she has been made to hate a married life; and when I have spoken to her of it she has told me that no one could remain her friend who advised her to marry. However, if the gentleman in question has as much tact as he is clever I doubt if she will persevere in her resolution. You will understand that she told me everything, and I appeared to know nothing at all about it.

This letter bears the date of the month of July, 1764. But what took place in the following months? The

Baroness d'Oberkirch [1]—who, by the way, was always hostile towards the Neckers,—tells us in her memoirs that Mme. de Vermenoux, in order to rid herself of her admirer, tried to make him marry her companion, saying to herself: "They will bore each other to death; that will give them something to do." Or it may be that after the elder lady had signified her refusal, the charms of the girl made themselves felt, and that Mme. de Vermenoux then lent her willing co-operation. We have here one of those little romantic episodes of daily life as to which it is always extremely difficult to know the whole truth. But one thing, however, is quite certain: that after a few months the whole aspect of affairs was completely changed. In another letter, which Suzanne Curchod wrote to Moultou in the beginning of October, she does not try to conceal from him the anxiety caused by the advances made to her by M. Necker, though the latter had just left for Geneva without formally declaring his intentions. And then, after excusing herself to her friend for her want

[1] Henrietta Louisa de Waldner Freundstein, born at the Castle of Schweigausen in Alsace, died in 1803. She married Baron Siegfried d'Oberkirch, and accompanied the Comte and the Comtesse du Nord (th Grand Duke Paul, afterwards Paul I., and the Grand Duchess Doro upon their journey to Paris. She has left memoirs containing some interesting details about the Court in France under Louis XVI. These memoirs were published in 1852 by her grandson, the Comte de Montbrison.

of confidence in him in a matter so delicate, she continues :—

My suspicions were the same as yours, but they were not aroused until two days after the departure of M. N., and then they did not last long. I felt quite sure that if there was any ground for them they would not escape you, and that you would act as you have done hitherto. But if on the other hand they were chimerical, how ridiculous I should have made myself appear to you ; and perhaps also what trouble would I not have caused you, as you saw the whole thing gradually dwindle away. For, my dear friend, we need not flatter ourselves, it will not succeed. If anything could have brought it about, it would have been your admirable conduct. It would not be possible to show greater dexterity or finer behaviour. You must have been forewarned as to this man's character, and you also think of me at a time when you are yourself overwhelmed with grief. . . No, I will never forget it. But in spite of all that, my dear friend, Necker is too much under the control of public opinion to allow himself to be led by one individual. He must be governed democratically, by the greatest number; he will therefore be unhappy all his life. You must allow that your Genevese are very unjust; for I should never have thought that the greatest and best effort I was capable of making would have been judged to be degrading. I mean those lessons. No one can know how painful they were to my sense of pride. But it matters not if both your heart and my own tells me I was doing what was right.

The new and brilliant perspective which seems to have exercised such a fascination over the mind of Suzanne Curchod, was the hope of seeing again her dear friends whom she had left behind in Geneva. A few days afterwards she writes again to Moultou :—

My idea is to follow exactly the plan that you have traced out for me; but unless a miracle happens I cannot hope for success. If it were to come to pass I should never be happy until I had brought you here. I will confess to you that I will never live anywhere far away from Gothon (Mlle. Cayla, Moultou's sister-in-law); I am too weak to do so, and if she does not come to me here I will do everything I can to go near to her. That is one of my dearest wishes. But if our fine castle in the air tumbles down I will marry Correvon (the barrister at Yverdon) next summer. He and all my relations never leave off tormenting me to do so. He will let me spend two months in the year with you, and in this way I shall be able to get some repose. . . Do not repeat what I have said in this letter, though you may do so to my Gothon. I hope to write to her as soon as Necker comes, so that she may tell you the result of the interview.

M. Necker came back from Geneva; and Suzanne Curchod saw that she had wronged him in supposing that he could, as in a democratic government, allow his own private judgment to be governed by the multitude. Shortly after his arrival she received from him a letter asking for a private interview, and he probably gave her to understand what would be the nature of his communication. I have not been able to find the original of this letter, but only that of the answer, written with a trembling hand, and which was always most preciously preserved by M. Necker. Suzanne Curchod wrote:—

I must therefore, sir, write to you that which I should not have dared to speak. If your happiness depends upon me I

fear that you have not been happy before wishing it.[1] I will remain in my own room all the evening, and I will keep the door closed.

The news that Suzanne Curchod was going to marry a rich Paris banker spread rapidly over all the country in which she had lived, from Lausanne to Geneva, and gave great satisfaction to her friends. The large number of letters and the cordial tone in which they were written, shows how highly she was esteemed, and the affection that was everywhere felt for her in her own native country. Moultou was of course foremost in the degree of warmth with which he expressed his congratulations. It was with heartfelt pleasure he wrote to her: "I surrender into the hands of M. Necker the melancholy authority of censor that you have been so gracious to accord to me over your actions." In this general felicitation there was only one discordant note,—that of the unfortunate barrister at Yverdon; who complained that he had been so long deluded with vain hopes, and that he was made aware of his own misfortune and of another's happiness at the same moment. He was not altogether wrong when he wrote to her: "I see very clearly that you looked upon me as a miserable make-shift, and that

1 In a little tale, entitled *Les Suites d'une seule Faute*, which he wrote at the request of Madame Staël, M. Necker put this same phrase into the mouth of his heroine.

you were looking out for the first opportunity that might occur to settle yourself in Paris or elsewhere." But when he had given way to his first burst of anger he goes on to say:—

But why should I cast a cloud over your joy by recalling what is past. I forgive your conduct, mademoiselle and my dearest friend, most sincerely ; and I pray to God with all my heart that he may plentifully bestow his blessings upon you, upon your dear husband, and upon all your posterity. I beg that you will not quite forget me, and that you will extend to me a friendship free from all caprice of humour. Believe me that I should think myself infinitely happy if it was permitted to me to show you the proofs of my friendship, which will end only with my life. But as you have the good fortune to marry a man with an income of thirty-five thousand francs a year you can no longer want assistance from any one. You have chosen him ; he is therefore worthy of you. Enjoy the happiness that heaven has prepared for both of you : *Non equidem invideo, miror magis.*

I am, with deep respect,

CORREVON.[1]

In replying to all these letters the affianced couple were not lukewarm in enthusiastical expressions as to their joy. "I am marrying a man," Suzanne Curchod says in one of the letters published by the Comte Golowkin, "whom I should believe to be an angel, if his great love for me did not show his weakness."

[1] There is still a well-known family bearing the name Correvon in French Switzerland. One of their members has written a book upon jurisprudence that is much esteemed.

And on his side M. Necker replied to the congratulations offered by Moultou :—

Yes, sir, your friend has been good enough to accept me for her husband, and I account myself as happy as it is possible for a man to be. I do not understand why congratulations should be given to you, unless it be as my friend. Will money always be the measure by which we are to value people ? It is shameful. He who gets an honest, lovable, and affectionate wife, makes a good bargain whether he be seated or not upon bags of gold. Poor human creatures, what judges you are ! But nothing astonishes me in that respect. Are there not insects who would place upon a heap of mud the altar of happiness !

Whatever part Mme. de Vermenoux may have taken towards the bringing about of this marriage, the position of the two lovers with regard to her must have been somewhat delicate. It may be that the thought of happiness to which she herself might have aspired, created in her heart regrets which she was not able to conceal. There must have been some misunderstanding of this nature, for the betrothed pair both judged it prudent not to tell her of the day of their marriage until the ceremony had been actually performed. We may conclude so much from a cleverly written note that Mme. Necker sent to Mme. de Vermenoux immediately after the service was finished :—

A thousand and a thousand pardons, madam, for the little trick which I have just played upon you ; but it would have been too painful to me to have gone to you to say good-bye. If you had

been present at the ceremony you would have made me forget that I was joining myself to the man I love best in all the world. In that tie I should only have seen the great separation it was going to cost me. And I should have looked upon our separation under a false light, for my marriage will increase, if it be possible, the attachment with which I have hitherto devoted myself to you. I am going to take M. Necker's part in life, and we shall never be more united than in our endeavours to contribute to your happiness. That has been already the subject of conversation between us. I hope that you will try to help us in our attempts. They will be as constant as your kindness and as our gratitude. My illness made M. Necker hurry on the marriage day. I will come to make my excuses to you to-morrow morning if I am strong enough to do so. Ah! what a good friend I am going to leave, and what will M. Necker not have to do if he wishes to repay me.

A separation from her patroness was the inevitable consequence of Suzanne Curchod's marriage. She then left the Rue Grange Batelière, in which Mme. de Vermenoux lived, and went into the heart of the Marais quarter of the town, into the Rue Michel le Comte, where was situated the house belonging to the firm of Thelusson and Necker.

CHAPTER V.

THE FRIDAYS—MARMONTEL, AND THE ABBÉ MORELLET.

THE Rue Michel le Comte was then, as now, lost in the middle of the Marais, between the Rue Saint Martin and the Rue du Temple. A short, narrow, and dark street, it is now nearly altogether occupied by the warehouses of furniture dealers, or by those of bronze manufacturers. There are hardly more than two private houses, with large arched doorways, spacious courtyards, and high windows; in either of which we may easily imagine that the offices and counting-house of a bank had been established in the last century. It was in all probability into one of these two houses that the daughter of the minister of Crassier found herself transplanted. At first she was unaccustomed to the duties that pressed themselves upon her in her new situation, for she had as yet kept some of her country airs and manners, and she confessed at a later date that she felt herself to be considerably embarrassed when she found herself mistress of an immense house, surrounded by

a retinue of servants, and obliged to have by her side a cash book for household expenses, in which to cast up her accounts, knowing very little all the while what she was actually doing. But the knowledge of her want of experience did not at all diminish her joy, and when she wrote to Moultou she always signed herself the happiest of women and the most affectionate of friends. In a letter which she wrote to one of the playmates of her childhood she expressed herself with more openness as to the details of her daily life:—

You are expecting, my angel, that I should give you a true picture of my state of mind, which I know forms an essential part of your own. My dear, I have married a man who is, in my eyes, the most lovable of mortals, and I assure you that I am not the only woman who thinks so. I had a liking for him as soon as I first knew him; I would have told you so if I had been with you, but I did not dare to write. At present, the only thing that I see in all the world is my husband. All my tastes, all my feelings, are bound up in him. I do not care about any other men, except inasmuch as they are more or less like him; and I compare them only that I may perceive the difference. . . . My husband's attentions to me are boundless. It seems to me that I care for nothing but for his love for me; and my love for him is so strong that I see only him, even though I am in the most agreeable company; and the presence of any man whom I liked before is now irksome to me if I am far away from my dear husband. Such is my condition, my dear heart; my life is in the hands of God. I no longer pray to him to take it away from me; I do not ask him to prolong it to me. I place myself with confidence into the hands of him who has guided me with so much care and so much goodness.

Her somewhat satirical nature was not however altogether quenched by her conjugal enthusiasm; for in a letter to Moultou's sister-in-law—to her darling Gothon, far away from whom she once thought that she could not endure to live—she draws a portrait of her husband with charming raillery:—

> Picture to yourself the worst witted fellow in the whole world, so completely persuaded of his own superiority that he does not even see mine; so convinced of his own powers of penetration that he is ever being cajoled; so certain that he possesses every talent in the highest degree of perfection that he does not condescend to look elsewhere for instruction; never astonished at the littleness of others, because he is always enveloped in his own greatness; ever comparing himself to those round about him so that he may have the pleasure of seeing that no comparison is possible; confounding men of parts with the ignorant because he thinks himself to be placed upon a mountain, and that all creatures inferior to himself must be on the same level below him; preferring fools also because he thinks they make a more striking contrast with his own sublime genius;—and with all this as capricious as a pretty woman, and at the same time much more inquisitive. Still I may flatter myself that the innocent dose that this letter will give him [while she was writing M. Necker was looking over her shoulder] will cure him for a while of his insufferable malady.

In the same lively and fantastic spirit Mme. Necker wrote to Moultou, describing her early impressions of Paris, of society, and of all that she saw. Quite at first, while she was under Mme. de Vermenoux's roof, these impressions were far from favourable, and

in the severity of her opinions we may see plainly enough the prejudice of a foreigner determined not to be captivated by dazzling colours. If she is taken to the opera she likes it very well, but has none of the sensation of wonder. If she gets a letter from Switzerland asking her for literary chit-chat or for interesting news, she does not know any, for she hears nothing talked about but clothes and equipages, and she sees nothing but idle follly. If the folly was only amusing, she might like it better. Most of the wits appear to her to be dull and unentertaining, and none of them in her mind are comparable to her friend. As regards the French ladies, their thoughts seem to be wholly bent upon finding new means whereby to make themselves fascinating. But she became gradually open to receive and to understand the captivating charms, the quick movement, and the refined luxury of Paris, as to all of which there are very few minds so rigid as always to fight against them; and in spite of the hasty severity with which she pronounced her opinion upon the customs of Paris a fortnight after her arrival, she was soon willing to acknowledge to a defect in the people of her own country. "It is a fault in all the Swiss," she says, "to be enchanted to be in a large town and to speak ill of it. We perch ourselves at a window on the fourth story, and with a pencil and paper we take a note of

every one who passes by in the street." At length, after a few years residence in the capital, she fairly acknowledged herself as beaten; and in one of those letters to Mme. de Branles, published by the Comte Golowkin,[1] she gave the following subtle and carefully expressed judgment upon Paris, which, if they are honest enough to own it, most foreigners will admit to be not untrue :—

Come and stay some time with us, madam ; you will then not be so much surprised at the illusion which makes us prefer Paris to any other place. You may afterwards perhaps share the same opinion. It is certain that one may, and that one ought to be, more happy elsewhere ; but one must then be ignorant of an enchantment, which, though it does not bring with it happiness, yet it poisons every other kind of life. We are like those gourmands whose *blasé* palates disdain every sort of food, and yet who cannot return to simple and wholesome dishes. The delicacy of taste is brought to a wonderful point of perfection in things appertaining to the body as well as to those of the mind; and we now see repeated before us, morally and physically, the history of the Sybarite whom the crease in the rose leaf prevented from going to sleep.

When Mme. Necker thus owned herself captivated

[1] In the year 1754 Etiennette Chavanne married M. Clavel de Branles, a distinguished jurisconsult, and who occasionally wrote verses. She had herself written a tragedy, taking Cato as the subject (perhaps it was a translation of Addison's *Cato*) ; and this play Mme. Necker endeavoured, a few years later, to get performed in Paris, but without success. In Beuchot's edition of Voltaire's correspondence we find letters written by him to M. de Branles.

by the charms of life in Paris, her house had long since become the centre of a literary circle whose fame overshadowed the receptions of Mme. Geoffrin, which that lady had established with so much foresight and with so much care. Three or four years had been sufficient to assure the success of an undertaking to which Mme. Necker began to devote herself, immediately after her marriage, with all the systematic ardour which she knew so well how to employ when her wishes coincided with her sense of duty. I do not conceive it to be necessary to explain the reason for this ardour in order to see, as Mme. Necker's enemies have seen, an ambitious design planned long beforehand, and a sequence of deep complications to bring her husband into power by giving to him the support of the men of letters of the day. It will be enough if we recollect that in her girlhood she was passionately fond of every intellectual sort of amusement, and that she did not abandon these pleasures until she was absolutely forced to do so. When she accepted Mme. de Vermenoux's offer to go with her to Paris one of the reasons which she gave to herself, amongst a few reflections hastily committed to paper, was the facility she would have for dividing her time between "reading, correspondence, noisy pleasures, and friendship. For nothing," she adds, "could be more delightful than such a kind of life." We need not

wonder, therefore, that as soon as she became mistress of her own time she should have endeavoured to realise that sort of pleasing life for which she had longed when she was a girl. Her husband gave her his assistance, though sometimes not without a show of disinclination on his part; and the absent-minded air of indifference which he wore when in his wife's drawing-room, has been not unfrequently brought against him, as though he were suspected of ambitious designs.

We cannot, however, altogether conceal from ourselves the fact that M. Necker's large income, and his purse always open, was not without its influence in the quickly earned success of the literary and social undertaking that had been planned and carried out by his wife. Many years had elapsed since men of letters first began to seek assistance from the financiers; and we are justified in assuming that when Corneille dedicated his *Cinna* to the farmer-general Montoron,[1] the poet was in fact making a polite request for pecuniary aid, rather than offering to the rich man a present as a mark of his own esteem. But protection had become all the more necessary to these men; for inasmuch as they grew bolder, more numerous, less upheld by the feeling of their own

[1] Montoron is hardly known to us, except through the dedication addressed to him by Corneille. In the *Biographie Universelle* his name is not mentioned.

worth, they had ceased, like their ancestors of the seventeenth century, to lay their requests before the king or the members of his court, but strove instead to enlist themselves into the service of a rising power—public opinion—from which they hoped to win their triumph. As public opinion was not then officially recognised, it was expressed only by the voice of men of letters themselves; and they were all the more disposed to put their faith in the infallibility of its sovereign judgments because they themselves prepared and pronounced the decrees. In truth, the assistance rendered in troublous times was not of the most material kind, and they often found themselves in the Bastille after they had spent much time and labour in what they deemed to be the public service. The cells of this prison were sometimes convenient halting places, for a revival of popularity often greeted men as they came out; but still they ran a fair chance of being forgotten if they had not some good friend in high places who was willing and powerful enough to procure their release. We may also add that the rights of literary proprietorship were not so well determined, nor were the profits so abundant as they have since become; that the success of two or three novels, or of two or three stage plays did not make the fortune of the writer; and that the perpetual fear of seizure of works, or of a prohibition to perform, always

afforded to the booksellers and to the actors an excuse for not rewarding the author with liberal payment.

The protection of some influential personage, either as a means of avoiding the Bastille or as a help for getting out, and the purse of a wealthy financier into which they might be allowed to put their hands in difficult moments, were remedies not unfrequently much needed by men of letters in the eighteenth century; though there were not wanting others who were bold and proud enough not to accept or to ask for help. But what a godsend to find this twofold assistance in one person—in a financier whose merit was everywhere recognised, and whose close connection with the public purse made his renown quite sure, while it also, at the same time, was laying the way for his political reputation! The good fortune must have also been considerably enhanced by the fact that the house of the financier was kept by a lady who was young, handsome, and agreeable, a woman who devoted herself to literature, and who was careful to flatter the little vanities of those who came into her drawing-room. We may understand, therefore, that Mme. Necker should be better able in two or three years to bring round about her a circle of choice friends than another mistress of a house, less favoured by outward circumstances, could have done perhaps during the whole course of her life. The apartments in the

Rue Michel le Comte, which were adjoined to the offices of the bank, soon became too small for Mme. Necker in her new mode of life; she and her husband, therefore, left the Marais, and went to live in the Rue de Cléry, in a house then known by the name of the Hôtel Leblanc. This house, which was situated at the corner of the Rue du Petit Carreau, and which upon the old maps of Paris occupies a space of considerable extent, had belonged at the beginning of the century to M. Claude Leblanc,[1] and this gentleman, because he had incurred the displeasure of Mme. de Prie,[2] was sent off into the Bastille. The rounded façade of the house was imposing in appearance. A large staircase with a handsome iron balustrade went as far as the apartments on the first floor. The ceilings of these

[1] Claude Leblanc, born in 1669, died at Versailles in 1728. He had been *maître des requêtes* and intendant in Auvergne; and in 1718 he was appointed Secretary of State for War. He was accused of having contributed to the downfall of Jonchère, the Treasurer Extraordinary for War, by taking money irregularly from the funds, and was then obliged to resign office. He was imprisoned in the Bastille, and the Chamber of the Arsenal was instructed to examine his case. The matter was brought before the Parliament, and Leblanc was acquitted; in 1726 he was reinstated as Minister for War. He occupied this office at his death. The Hôtel Leblanc, once numbered 27 Rue de Cléry, was pulled down in the year 1842 to make way for the Rue de Mulhouse.

[2] Agnès Berthelot de Pleneuf, Marquise de Prie, born in 1698, died in 1727. One of the reasons for her hatred against Claude Leblanc was because he had married her mother, with whom she had lately quarrelled.

rooms were painted with mythological pictures, and the walls were decorated with arabesques and medallions. It was here that M. and Mme. Necker lived until they became established in the General Control Office; and here they opened their drawing-rooms, at first to men and women of letters only. It was not until later, during the time when M. Necker was in office and afterwards, that new elements, social and political, became introduced. Mme. Necker's reception day was usually Friday. She was advised to choose that day so as not to disturb the Mondays and Wednesdays of Mme. Geoffrin, not to clash with the Tuesdays of Helvétius,[1] nor with the Thursdays and Sundays of Baron d'Holbach.[2] But whenever there was a dinner party she always took care that there should be some dish not of meat for

[1] Claude Adrién Helvétius, born in Paris in 1715, died in 1771. At one time he was Farmer-General, but he resigned his office when he married Mademoiselle de Ligneville, a lady of a high Lorraine family. From that time Helvétius devoted himself principally to literature and to philosophy. In 1758 he published a book entitled, *De l'Esprit*, which was censured by the Sorbonne, and was publicly burned.

[2] Paul Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach, born in 1723 at Hildesheim in the Palatinate, died in Paris in 1789. His dinners, to which he used to invite his friends the encyclopædists, either in Paris or at his château at Grandval, created for him the title *premier maître d'hotel de la philosophie*—head philosophy cook—a name that was given to him by the abbé Galiani. The abbé Morellet says of him in his *Mémoires*, "He says things that would bring the thunder down upon the house a hundred times, if thunder ever did fall down."

those of her guests (they were not very numerous we may imagine) who conformed to the precepts laid down by the Church. Mme. Necker's Fridays have been sung by Voltaire :—

> Vous qui chez la belle Hypatie,[1]
> Tous les vendredis raisonnez,
> De vertu, de philosophie,
> Et tant d'exemples en donnez. . . .

The Friday was, in truth, the grand day for men of letters and for the philosophers, and it is probable that much reasoning was then current. Mme. Necker soon instituted another day, at first Tuesday, of which the character was very different; only friends, more or less intimate, were then invited. "Madame X. has two days: one for the wits, and another for the simpletons; I belong to the latter." This was said about forty years ago by a lady, a friend of another lady who opened her house two days in the week—once for literary folk, and the other time for general society. We may be sure it was not to simpletons that Mme. Necker extended a willing welcome every Tuesday, but on that day she invited a few particular friends, and she liked them to meet those of her Friday guests for whom she

[1] Hypatia was a daughter of the celebrated mathematician, Theon of Alexandria, and she made herself celebrated by the public lectures she gave there upon philosophy. She was massacred by the people in 415 A.D. She was born about the year 370.

herself had the greatest preference. Sometimes the friends were asked to dinner—that is, at four o'clock—(and even at that hour the Marquise de Créquy thought that it was too late—she vowed that she would never be caught there again), and sometimes to supper (the fourth end of a man, as Mme. du Deffand said, confessing that she did not quite recollect the other three); and the evening was afterwards kept up to a late hour, fresh arrivals coming in at all times. The manner of reception was kind and cordial—too cordial, perhaps, on the side of Mme. Necker—somewhat cold and involuntarily haughty on the side of her husband, who was often absorbed in other thoughts. The dinner was sometimes not altogether perfect; at least if we may believe Grimm, who says, in the *Annonces et Bans de l'Église philosophique:* "Sister Necker wishes it to be known that she gives a dinner every Friday. The Church will accept, because she thinks very highly of her, and also of her husband; it were to be wished that she thought equally well of her cook." This first of the doctrinaire ancestors then inaugurated the somewhat superb show of contempt for material things with which Sainte-Beuve reproached them as being an intellectual inferiority. "Those men of parts," he said, "who at table eat at random, and swallow down hurriedly, with a sort of disdain, that which is necessary for the

nourishment of the body (and I have seen the majority of the doctrinaires do so) may be great reasoners and men of high intelligence, but they are not *men of taste.*" In the new generation we have no doctrinaires; but, on the other hand, we have very many more men of taste—at least in that restricted sense meant by Sainte-Beuve, and which was probably prompted by a fit of temper after having eaten a bad dinner.

The Hôtel Leblanc was not the only place in which Mme. Necker extended her hospitality. As M. Necker was retained by business all the year in Paris, and as he feared that his wife, in her delicate state of health, would suffer from the heat of the summer, he first took on lease the Château de Madrid,[1] at the extremity of the Bois de Boulogne, and afterwards he bought the Chateâu de Saint Ouen, a handsome house on the banks of the Seine, between Paris and Saint Denis, where there were foliage and shady walks, making it a very agreeable summer residence.[2] Saint Ouen was near enough to Paris to drive there to dinner; but of the faithful Friday visitors there were few who could

[1] The Château de Madrid had been built by François I. after his captivity in Madrid. It was pulled down under Louis XVIII.

[2] We must not confound this Château de Saint Ouen, which after having belonged to M. Necker went into the Ternaux family, with that one close to it, from which Louis XVIII. addressed his celebrated declaration to the French people.

show a carriage and horses of their own. It was therefore a mark of kindness on the part of Mme. Necker to send in her own, just as in years gone by she lent old *Grison* to the young ministers who came to preach at Crassier in the place of her father. The evening passed by in pleasant conversation under the large trees upon the terrace, and those of the guests who did not sleep at Saint Ouen were afterwards driven back into Paris.

Now that the surroundings have been made clear to us, it is time that we should sketch the figures, or rather the attitudes of the people concerned, for their features are sufficiently well known. We have Suard, the abbé Arnaud, Marmontel, Saint-Lambert, the abbé Morellet, the abbé Raynal, Thomas, Grimm, Diderot, d'Alembert, and many others whom I might mention if I wished to enumerate the names of all the men who frequented the *salon* of Mme. Necker. But such a long gallery of portraits might be wearisome; I prefer, therefore, to choose those whose letters will enable me to bring them once more before us, and perhaps to be able to present them under a somewhat new aspect. But before letting them each speak in turn singly, I am tempted to show them talking all together; and I am enabled to do this, thanks to M. Necker having put down upon paper immediately after his first

Friday's dinner, some of the conversation between his guests. They were Bernard:[1] (Voltaire's Gentil-Bernard), Suard,[2] Thomas, the abbé Morellet, and Marmontel. Though there is nothing very remarkable in the conversation, it may be interesting to see how far each one of the guests was true to his own general character. Bernard was gallant; M. Necker absent-minded; Morellet testy; Suard contradictory; Thomas emphatic; and Marmontel playful.

M. BERNARD.

You look excellently well, madam; your complexion is fairer than that of these flowers.

MADAME NECKER.

Poets are always gallant.

M. BERNARD.

Say rather sensitive.

MADAME NECKER.

The two qualities may go together; but I fear they will each lose their own meaning. I must give up the abbé as hopeless.

[1] Pierre Joseph Bernard, better known under the name of *Gentil-Bernard* because of a line of Voltaire's, was born at Grenoble in 1710, and died in Paris in 1775. He is the author of *l'Art d'Aimer*, a poem in three cantos.

[2] Jean Baptiste Antoine Suard, born at Besançon in 1734, died in Paris in 1819. Before the Revolution he belonged to the French Academy, and there exercised the functions of censor. Under the Empire he was chosen as a member of the second class in the Institute, and was appointed to the office of secretary for life.

For the last hour he has been declaiming against the ladies, and those gentlemen are encouraging him with their applause.

L'ABBÉ MORELLET.

Yes, madam, I maintain that women have not a grain of common sense, and I would have convinced you had you condescended to listen to me. But it is impossible to reason with you, and you prove our argument admirably. What do you say, M. Necker?

M. NECKER (in an absent fit).

Thank you, sir, I do not eat it.

MADAME NECKER.

Madam Riccoboni,[1] for instance, excels in her own way.

M. SUARD.

But, first of all, has she a way of her own?

MADAME NECKER.

She has if she can write with warmth, with grace, and can interest her readers.

M. SUARD.

Writing! I do not know what is meant by writing. She can arrange phrases well enough; but she has no imagination, no ideas.

MADAME NECKER.

Sir, you are exaggerating.

[1] Marie Jeanne Laboras de Mézières, wife of the actor and dramatist, Antoine François Riccoboni, was born in Paris in 1714, and died in 1792. After having appeared upon the stage, she wrote several novels, some of which had a very great success; among others, *Les Lettres de Julie Catesby*, and *Ernestine*.

M. SUARD.

I don't know what is meant by exaggerating. Exaggerating is a word that has got no meaning. No one exaggerates; we express our thoughts, that is all.

MADAME NECKER.

I can never agree with M. Suard, even about the weather; for if I say it is raining, he does not understand what rain means.

M. SUARD.

Ah! charming creature, you are laughing at me. But to the point; M. Thomas wishes to guard his neutrality. That is not right.

M. THOMAS.

I confess, sir, that women may want the fire that burns in us; they may lack that noble enthusiasm which prolongs our night labours and makes them descend to the remotest posterity. But if they cannot ascend with us into the skies, they embellish the earth. A virtuous woman is the most beautiful object to a loving soul.

M. MARMONTEL.

Virtuous! Splendid, my dear Thomas. But will you be good enough to take those ladies with you up into heaven, and leave the others to play with us here upon earth.

M. BERNARD.

For shame, sir. You speak as a profane man; you forget that you are in the sanctuary.

The conversation ends here, and it now remains to us to make a selection from the guests invited to this Friday's dinner. Let us begin with Marmontel, the author of the

Contes Moraux (and also of *La Neuvaine de Cythère*), a man who had his hour of happiness in the eighteenth century, but of whom Mme. du Deffand spoke with much smartness when she said, somewhat crudely, that "he was only a beggar clothed in rags." Marmontel[1] was, in fact, among the first and one of the most constant recipients of Mme. Necker's hospitality, and her name recurs frequently enough in those singular *Mémoires,* full of unedifying matter, which he professed to have left for the instruction of his children. We shall see that the manner in which he spoke of her contrasted very strongly from the lady whom he was pretending to describe. He says in his *Mémoires* :—

It was at a ball given by some townsfolk (a rather singular circumstance) that I first made the acquaintance of Mme. Necker. She was then young, and pretty enough. She had a very clear complexion; she danced badly, but with great energy. Immediately she heard my name mentioned she came up to me and said, her face beaming with all the simple-mindedness of joy: "When I came to Paris, one of my greatest wishes was to know the author of the *Contes Moraux.* I little thought that at a ball I should have met with so much good fortune . . . ." Then, calling to her husband, she said: "Necker, you must join with me in begging M. Marmontel to do us the honour to come and see us." M. Necker was very gracious in his invitation to me, and I accepted it.

[1] Jean François Marmontel, born at Bort, in Limousin, in the year 1723, died in Paris, 1799.

Then follow two pages in which Marmontel expresses his own opinion upon M. and Mme. Necker. After granting to the lady a few words of praise which it might be difficult to refuse to her, such as *decency*, candour, and goodness, he covers them with critical remarks, some of which may, perhaps, have their show of truth, but they all bear unmistakable marks of being dictated by uncharitable ill-humour. He describes Mme. Necker as being without taste in her dress, without care in her manner, without charm in her politeness, her mind and also her face too artificial to have in them an air of grace. Her language, he says, was so high-flown that its pomposity would have been laughable if one did not know that she was perfectly artless. Even in her amusements there was a reasoning and a method. Everything with her was premeditated; there was no illusion; nothing came as though from chance. It was not for her friends, it was not for herself, that she took so much trouble—it was for her husband. She intended that her salon, her dinners, should be to him as a relaxation from work, as things of pleasure. And the attentions of Mme. Necker, and all her desire to please, would not have repaid one for the annoyance that one felt at being present at these dinners got up for the purpose of entertaining her husband, if the same rule which we find common in other places

had not also held good there—that of allowing people to amuse themselves amongst themselves, thus relieving the hostess from minute attentions, provided that such demands were not made upon her. As regards M. Necker, the *Mémoires* say that as he had never given Marmontel reason to think that he was his friend, Marmontel therefore would not be his friend, and his wife also felt an unconquerable dislike to M. Necker.

After reading a judgment such as this, might we not think that Marmontel had been a guest at Mme. Necker's table admitted merely on sufferance, and that it was with difficulty that he overcame his distaste to being present at her dinners? Should we not also think that he always maintained a proud and independent bearing in his intercourse with M. Necker, that he had never asked for nor accepted any service? Some fragments of his correspondence will enable us to see how matters really stood between them. Marmontel's letters to Mme. Necker are not devoid of charm nor of elegance of style; they contain much interesting detail upon events then happening in the literary world, and upon the academical gossip of the times; and we may perceive throughout a very strongly marked tone of adulation, as to which it would be difficult to magnify or to vary more largely the ingenious expe-

dients employed by the writer. If he commences his letter by "Madame," it is because "Mon ange" has been so often profaned,—a term that ought to have been reserved for her alone, for he knows of nothing more celestial than the nature of her heart. If Mme. Necker is going to England for a few months, he threatens to swim across the Straits that he may be near to her: "Why should not friendship have her Leander as well as love?" He will pardon Marie Antoinette her partiality in favour of Gluck[1] (Marmontel himself was an ardent admirer of Piccini) because he has heard that meeting in the Bois de Boulogne "by some rare chance of fortune, goodness, wisdom, truth, and virtue itself, she greeted them with a loving welcome." The first fortnight after his marriage appeared to him to pass by slowly, because during that time he was obliged to be separated from Mme. Necker. Whenever he drives along the Avenue de Saint Ouen, past Mme. Necker's house, he sighs deeply, and says to his wife: "There, my child, you may behold the retreat of friendship, of wisdom, and of virtue. The pleasures of the mind and of the soul are as pure there as we are told they are in heaven." And then his

[1] Christopher Gluck, born in the Upper Palatinate in 1712, died at Vienna in 1787. As to the famous quarrel of the Gluckists and the Piccinists, see the work of M. Gustave Desnoirestenes.

wife guesses that it is to Mme. Necker's country-house that he is alluding. If he is obliged to be present at the rehearsals of one of his own plays, and cannot go to one of the Tuesday dinners (we see, therefore, that he was received into the house on terms of intimacy)—to this dinner to which he looks forward every week as a recompense for his seven days of hard work—he confesses that that is a very poor reason to deprive him of an honour which Socrates and Marcus Aurelius might well have envied. To show that these fragments, chosen partly at random, do not give a false idea of the enthusiasm that Marmontel professed for the woman whom he afterwards disparaged in his *Mémoires,* I will publish in full one of his letters, which may be otherwise interesting, as it gives a fair idea of Mme. Necker's character:—

It is with the greatest delight, madam, that we learn that your health is improving. The atmosphere of your own country has, no doubt, had much effect in bringing about such a salutary change; nature herself ought to be proud to have brought you into the world, and she ought to be careful in looking after you.[1] But, madam, I still think that your illness was first due to moral causes, and that, according to the principle *contraria contrariis curantur*, it must also be chiefly by moral causes that you will regain your strength. Continuous excitement, *too* deep affections, *too* rapid movement, and the worries of the mind, and of a mind far

[1] Mme. Necker was then staying on the banks of the Lake of Geneva.

too sensitive, have been the cause of *too* long and *too* great trials of organs that were in themselves *too* delicate. And what remedy is there for all these multiplied superlatives? As many diminutives to counteract them. I know well enough that one's nature is not altered; and if it be the case with you that you are over susceptible to the effects of ill-doing on the part of your fellow creatures—if your impatient kind-heartedness cannot let you remain quiet—this excess of virtue is a sin for which it will be difficult to find a cure. But it is the same with this as with other things: when one is not strong enough to fight against them and overcome them one must avoid the danger by running away from them. You have allowed yourself, in the last few years, to be bound by too many ties of commiseration and sympathy, and these are destroying you; I do not ask you to cast them all from you, but to be bound by them less strongly. You ought to go and live for some while in a country where there are no poor desolate people. Here, instead of nursing your sensibility, every one adds to it a fresh stimulus; and, as they take a delight in seeing the effects of pity working on a tender heart, as soon as anything sad or painful occurs they immediately rush to you to tell you of it. It is a cruel pleasure in which your friends rejoice—and I am as guilty as any one else—without heeding that they are always dosing you with slow poison. No, madam, I will not write to you of gladsome things, and I will clothe myself in the habit of Democritus in order that I may have the privilege of being your physician.

Marmontel then enters into details as to the health of his wife and of his child, and continues:—

I go to work in the morning, and after dinner I wander about and amuse myself. I make bold, madam, to ask you to follow my example. Nothing is more wholesome than this indolence and this giving way to one's own fancy; were it possible for you to follow this system I would vouch for your health. M.

Thomas is anxious that you should go down into one of the southern provinces, and there spend the winter. It is all very well for him to say so, for he ought to be there with you. I am more generous, and though I am kept in Paris I agree with him, and I exhort you to deprive me this year of one of the greatest pleasures of my life. I shall be well repaid, if, as I imagine, owing to the mildness of the climate, and especially the calm of a quieter life, you return with improved health.

Pardon me, madam, I am setting myself up as a doctor. I do not do so willingly; but I hear that you are better, and I will promise you to be beyond myself with joy. To be merry one must be lighthearted, and I cannot be so unless I may wish you further happiness.

Marmontel has said that M. Necker "had never given him reason to think that he was his friend," but yet no importunate man ever more often wearied the patience of a general-controller. Whether he was asking for something for himself, or for a pension out of the royal purse that he tried to get through M. Necker for the uncle of his wife (a niece of the abbé Morellet), who was soliciting a place as bookkeeper at Poissy, or for a brother-in-law of the same abbé, who wished to keep his small fortune in the custom-house at Lyons, or for any other friend or relation, Marmontel was as constant in his demands and as adroit in his applications made to the husband, as he was in the compliments and flatteries which he addressed to the wife. Sometimes he affects to be altogether disinterested: he is not the man who comes with begging appli-

cations, for he is too grateful for kindness already received both from M. and from Mme. Necker to worry them by demands for further favours. Sometimes he is bent down with effusions of gratitude: "his words fail him, vox faucibus hæsit;" and the remembrance of the kindness shown will be more precious to him than the service rendered. Sometimes, on the contrary, he speaks in an offended tone: if he cannot obtain from M. Necker that which any fair-minded minister ought to give him he will be obliged to report to his wife's relations (whose aversion I do not think was altogether unconquerable) that he is without influence and that they must put their case into the hands of some one who has more interest. But when his request is granted, he does not for a moment think of disowning his obligations to M. Necker. It costs nothing to such a man to be under obligation to any one; he brags of what M. Necker has done for him, and he appears proud of the services received.

But that we be not unjust we must allow that Marmontel repaid in author's tribute the pecuniary gratifications he had received from M. Necker. As well as being historiographer to the king, we may also say that he created for himself the office of poet-in-ordinary to the Necker family. A little later on we shall see that he wrote rhyming couplets for Mlle.

Necker; but before celebrating the charms of the daughter, he began by singing those of the mother. The Holy Susannah inspired him with some stanzas written according to the taste then in fashion, in which he represents every god and every goddess on Olympus wishing to make some present to a mortal creature: Apollo is the god of poetry, Minerva of wisdom, Venus of grace; and Truth is sent to bestow the gifts:—

Qui fut chargé de ce message?
Ce fut l'aimable Vérité.
De ces dons le juste partage
Fut remis à son équité.
A les placer elle s'empresse,
Mais, bientôt, ayant deviné
Qu'ils avaient tous la même adresse,
A Suzanne elle a tout donné.

At another time he sent to Mme. Necker her bust, with the following verse engraved upon it:—

A l'âme la plus pure, au plus sublime cœur
Que ces traits après moi rapellent ma mémoire,
Son amitié fit mon bonheur,
Son souvenir fera ma gloire.

Mme. Necker replied at once:—

Les soucis, tu le vois, ne troublent point son cœur,
Il se laisse adorer des filles de Mémoire,
Il donne à ses amis le soin de son bonheur
Et l'univers prend celui de sa gloire.

"La gloire de Marmontel!" This was one of those hollow expressions, the pomposity of which appeared laughable even to Marmontel himself. Mme. Necker, however, wrote in friendship; but since we do not find that he was actuated by friendly thoughts when he wrote his *Mémoires* it is only fair that documents which are irrefutable should put Marmontel back into his old position, which was one of obsequious importunity.

The abbé Morellet,[1] whose needy family so often begged assistance from M. Necker, had been with Marmontel one of the early frequenters of the Friday receptions. Mme. Necker had known him before her marriage, for he was a constant visitor in Mme. de Vermenoux's little salon, and she then gave a not unjust and an amusing account of him in one of her letters to Moultou:—

The abbé Morellet will have already given you a letter from me. He is a Paris wit, but he is quite incapable of appreciating you. Nevertheless he is a man of learning, he possesses certain talents, he has read philosophy, and knows the value of method. On the other hand, it is an ill-polished bear, unsuspicious of the ways of the world, or that the universe is made up

[1] The abbé Morellet was born at Lyons in 1727, and died in Paris in 1819. In spite of the title he had received from the church, he lived on terms of close intimacy with the philosophers. He wrote in the *Encyclopédie*, and he has left two volumes of *Mémoires*.

of big and little, and of men and women. He seems honest and true, to have a thousand good qualities, and a sufficient notion of religion to guess that there may be a God, and to say so sometimes to his friends when he judges them to be discreet and of good faith. I like him all the same, and I think that God will forgive his incredulity, which does not come from his heart.

If we may believe the *Mémoires* of the abbé Morellet, it would seem that Mme. Necker had gone to him for assistance as well as to Marmontel and to the abbé Raynal, to "lay the foundation of her literary society," and that it was he, Morellet, who advised her to choose Friday as her day of reception. The abbé allows that there was in her drawing-room much pleasant talk on literary matters, and that she herself could hold her own with the others; but he complains that on other subjects the conversation was restricted by the austerity of the mistress of the house, "who was averse to licence in religious opinions." His dealings with M. Necker were of a more delicate nature. The abbé Morellet put himself in direct antagonism with him when he attacked the privilege accorded to the India Company of which M. Necker had constituted himself the champion. Rightly or wrongly, it was thought that the part taken by the abbé in this matter was not altogether disinterested. Grimm formally charges him with having worn under a philosopher's cloak the livery of a financier;

M. Boutin[1] and Diderot both accuse him of having sold himself for a pension. And M. Necker, in a minute of rejoinder, made public the insinuations of the abbé Morellet. But all this did not prevent the abbé from seating himself every Friday at M. Necker's table, as though no cloud had risen up between them. Grimm says in his *Correspondance Littéraire:* "all the good people were singularly edified at seeing the want of malice in the worthy ecclesiastic, who took his place regularly once a week at M. Necker's table, just as though nothing had passed between them, though a good strapping, laid on not with a light hand, had been administered to him amid much public rejoicing."

The recollection of his chastisement, and even of a temporary misunderstanding between M. Necker and Turgot,[2] brought about by the discussion on the question of the buying and selling of corn, did not at all prevent the abbé Morellet from taking advantage—for the benefit at least of his relations, if not also for his own—of M. Necker's protection while he was in the Control Office. And all these vicissitudes rendered the abbé's

[1] Boutin had made for himself a name in the last century because he had opened some gardens at Tivoli; these gardens were also called *La Folie Boutin.*

[2] Anne Robert Turgot, Baron de l'Aulne, born in Paris in 1727, died in 1781.

task somewhat difficult when he afterwards wrote his *Mémoires.* But we must allow that he has acquitted himself of the difficulty with some tact and even good taste, although as we shall see he there speaks of M. Necker in a more cavalier tone than he liked to use in his correspondence. He maintains that the principal economical doctrines of his former antagonist will not bear examination; and, in his rather cumbersome language, he cannot allow to him, "according to the principle of the organisation of governments that sound and far-seeing knowledge which is necessary to a man to guide him safely through so many dangers." But he is especially averse to M. Necker's style in writing: "There are no doubt occasional happy expressions and fine thoughts; but the effort made is too often seen, the construction of the phrase is often unnatural, inaccuracies of language are frequent, and above everything there is a pretension which is wearisome to the reader."

It would seem that abbé Morellet was not always of this opinion, for in writing to Mme. Necker he thanks her for sending him her husband's book on the *Importance des Opinions Réligieuses*:—

MADAM,

I think I ought to address to you rather than to M. Necker himself the congratulations and the marks of high esteem which his last work deserves from all those who profess to love

eloquence and virtue. I would wish, for my part, to spare him the embarrassment of direct praise, to which he will be constantly forced to submit for a long time to come. My approbation will not weary him, but will rather gain in force when given out of your mouth. I have just finished reading this long volume, and to me it appeared short. The author has truly exhausted his subject, he has seen it under new aspects which were hitherto unknown. He exposes compound ideas with great clearness, he renders abstract notions perfectly intelligible. He unravels and analyses many hidden and delicate thoughts; but that which especially distinguishes his style from every other is that he has learnt the art of making dry metaphysics appear to be an interesting system of morals. I consider his work as one of the greatest productions of our own times, and one which will be frequently quoted when men wish to contrast our riches with those of the glorious age which has preceded us. I would also tell you of the vast erudition which the author has displayed if I did not know that this sort of praise would concern you very little. I must admire the moderation with which he speaks of his antagonists, and the adroitness with which he has avoided wounding the partisans of religious ceremonies in his own country. His book will adopt itself to every form of faith; I hope that he will allow me to be a participator in his creed. We may, perhaps, have together a few *theological* disputes upon matters of detail, but there will be no thought of heresy between us. I shall consider as heretics all those (if there be any) who do not agree in the importance and in the charm of this work. I beg that you will assure M. Necker of my high esteem for his book, and that you will accept the homage of my profound respect.

The *heretics* have gained the day, for very many years have elapsed since M. Necker's book was spoken of as one of the literary monuments which can

claim for the eighteenth century the privilege of being spoken of in comparison with the preceding age; but we may regard the abbé Morellet's letter as an elegant model of the art of paying to an author compliments which perhaps exceed a not very rigid measure of common honesty.

CHAPTER VI.

GRIMM AND DIDEROT.

If Marmontel, and even the abbé Morellet, during their lifetime, played a brilliant part in the *salon* of Mme. Necker, their reputation is now overshadowed by that of a man whose name will probably more strongly interest the reader. I do not know if it be owing to the charm felt in reading the *Mémoires de Mme. d'Epinay*, or to the value of his own *Correspondance Littéraire* that Grimm[1] is indebted to the revival of popularity which he now enjoys. The attention of those who take pleasure in literary history has lately been turned towards him by the simultaneous publication of a complete edition of his correspondence, and also by the publication—a work too little known in France—of the letters written

[1] Frédéric Melchior Grimm, born at Ratisbon in 1723, died at Gotha in 1807.

and addressed to him by the Empress Catherine II. of Russia.[1] The time is now ripe for a careful examination which would enable us to see clearly the mental physiognomy of this man, which as yet is hazy and uncertain. But I need not now inquire whether such a study would leave untarnished the reputation for straightforwardness and high-bearing, and also,—if in speaking of a man of the eighteenth century I may use an expression now somewhat hackneyed, that of a "gentleman,"—qualities which Grimm with much cleverness knew so well how to assume. We should then see how in her letters Catherine treats this high-mindedness, how she scolds him whom she calls "Monsieur le philosophe," or "Céleste baron," or again, more often and with a greater show of reason, "Monsieur le souffre-douleur," or "Son Excellence souffre-douleurienne," and who she says is never happy, "but when he is in a room with, near to, or close by the side of, before or behind, some German Royal Highness." All this would take me beyond my subject, for in his intercourse with Mme. Necker, we see Grimm only in his usual aspect,—that of a man of letters discreet, witty, and courteous.

[1] The letters written by Catherine to Grimm have been published in Russia, as well as those from Grimm to Catherine. The latter form a separate volume, and are remarkable only by their insignificance.

It would seem that at first Grimm was somewhat reserved in his friendship with Mme. Necker. Perhaps he enjoyed so well the close intimacy allowed to him in Mme. d'Epinay's[1] house that he did not willingly go for amusement elsewhere; and it was not always an easy matter to get him to come to supper, if we may judge by a strangely written little note which Mme. Necker wrote to him not long after their acquaintance began:—

M. Tronchin comes to supper here on Saturday. M. Grimm hardly comes at all; and to propose such a thing to him would surely be an act of great indiscretion. But yet I will venture. Perhaps my letter may reach you in a favourable moment; for, let people say what they will, I will not give you up as hopeless as long as I feel in my heart so strong a desire to pardon you. Come to us then if you are in Paris, and if my proposition does not bore you too much. You will give me a double pleasure.

I announced to M. Necker with all convenient care the arrangements that you had made for your tickets, but I did not see so much change come over his face as I had expected; and I must confess that in spite of all your attempts to injure him I fear that your appreciation of the good opinion of the world is much the same as his. Adieu, monsieur; you know of my friendship for you, and you know better than I do how far it is well founded.

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[1] Louise Florence Pétronille Tardieu d'Esclavelles, born in 1725, married her cousin, M. de Lalive d'Epinay, farmer-general, and died in 1783. Her long friendship with Grimm, her quarrels with Rousseau, and above all the publication of her *Mémoires*, have made her name well known.

Grimm could hardly refuse such a gracious invitation, especially when, as it would appear from Mme. Necker's letter, she had acted as mediator between him and her husband in some matter relating to money. We may suppose that Grimm found the society of Mme. Necker more delightful than he had expected, for he soon threw off his coldness; and before very long he bewails his misfortune in living so far away from her, and not being able easily enough to satisfy his constant desire to see her:—

I give you my honour (he writes to her) that I can find no other fault in you than that you live in the Rue de Cléry, and that you have not got a house between the Place Vendôme and the Palais Royal. This is unpardonable, madam; I feel that I should see you for a short moment every day, and I feel more strongly still how much I am losing by seeing you so seldom. But that does not at all accord with a passion for you which is ever growing stronger and warmer. I hate the Paris which you love because one cannot make the duties agree with most legitimate pleasures; and I am mad with myself at being fastened down on to my chair when I might be by your side chatting agreeably in front of the fire.

After they once knew each other, Mme. Necker's name occurs frequently enough in Grimm's correspondence. It is to him that we owe the history of that celebrated dinner at which seventeen men of letters seated round Mme. Necker's table proposed to erect by means of subscription a statue to Voltaire. This is

a well-known episode in the literary history of the eighteenth century; and at last it became the cause of endless annoyance to Mme. Necker because of the obstinacy shown by Pigalle[1] in wishing to have Voltaire represented almost naked, but on the other hand it drew from the patriarch of Ferney the homage contained in the following lines:—

> Ah! si jamais de ma façon
> De vos attraits on voit l'image,
> On sait comment Pygmalion
> Traitait autrefois son ouvrage.

Grimm knew better than to imitate the disdainful severity of Marmontel's language about a lady from whom he had frequently received kindness. Still he thought he had a cause of complaint against her because of her pretension to religious convictions, as to which he could never altogether believe. "Hypatie-Necker," he once wrote, when treating of *Le Système de la Nature*,[2] "spends her life with the Systematists, but she is devout after her own way. She would wish to be wholly Huguenot, or Socinian, or Deist; or rather, to be something she has made up her mind

[1] Jean Baptiste Pigalle, born in Paris in 1714, died in 1785. The statue of Voltaire by Pigalle is now in the Palace of the Institute.

[2] *Le Système de la Nature, ou des lois du monde physique et moral*, is a work in two octavo volumes that d'Holbach had published in London in the year 1770, under the pseudonym of Mirabaud.

not to give heed to any of them." In spite of this tone of irony Grimm was once obliged to allow that if Mme. Necker's religious opinions were not very soundly established from a theological point of view, she was quite in earnest in wishing that they should be believed. One Friday, before going in to dinner, the conversation suddenly turned upon some point of religious controversy, and Mme. Necker, who was much hurt by an opinion put forward by Grimm, answered at first with warmth, then, seeing that Grimm still retained his opinion, she lost all control over herself, and suddenly burst into tears before her discountenanced guests. That same evening, Mme. Necker, ashamed of her fit of anger, wrote a letter to Grimm in which she excused herself for her outburst of temper, and Grimm answered her with much warmth of feeling:—

Your letter, madam, has caused me the deepest and the most unexpected feelings of emotion. It has taken hold of me and confounded me. It made me cry like a child, and at first it was quite impossible for me to hold my pen. But why do you exercise so much power over me? You ask my pardon, but for what? For what offence? I assure you with all the sincerity and all the truth that I possess that the idea of casting a reproach upon you never came near to me, and but for your letter would never have occurred to my mind. Three thoughts flashed before me in an instant. The first was to reproach myself for having so inconsiderately touched upon a subject, the importance of

which was then of so delicate a nature; the second was to love and to admire the earnestness with which you stopped me at the first word; the third was to blame myself for the emotion which I involuntarily caused you, and which might be prejudicial to your health, especially just at the moment when you were going to begin dinner. Judge for yourself, madam, if I could have been mistaken as to the reasons for this emotion, and if the idea of an offence coming from you could have been present to my thoughts.

The only regret that I felt was not to have explained myself with sufficient clearness to show that, whatever our religion may order us to believe as a matter of necessity, it has an invincible horror of intolerance and of persecution, and that one of its most inviolable precepts is to allow every one to be the master of his own creed and of his own conscience. The warmth with which you silenced me only made me feel the unsuitability of a proposition at the time so badly explained. I trust, madam, you will think well enough of me to feel sure that I attach as much importance as you do to the proper time for such discussion; and especially be good enough to dismiss from your mind that which you call the superiority of my opinion. Though my opinions are very decided I have not often occasion to show them; and I confess to you in all humility that whenever I make them known they are received in society with absolute inattention and with the most complete indifference. That does not really change them, but I am very glad that it should be so. I will soon come and lay myself at your feet, and I shall think myself happy if I can convince you that I am as grateful to you as I ought to be for all your kindness. I cannot express this idea but in commonplace language; but it seems to me that since I received your letter I am moved with a more lively and more profound sense of gratitude.

During the long course of travels in Prussia and in Russia in company with Diderot, Grimm kept up a

constant correspondence with Mme. Necker. His letters, written with a quick and ready pen, are curious from more than one point of view. We see how easily those proud philosophers of the eighteenth century knew how to adopt the manners of the courtier. At one time he dresses himself up as a shepherd, he carries a crook and wears an apple-green coat to play a part in a pastoral fête given by Prince Henry[1] in the Castle at Rheinsberg. "You may guess," he adds, "that it would not do for a good-for-nothing philosopher who has run away from the Rue Sainte Anne to wish to be exempt from the general rule." On the other hand, at another time he goes with the King of Prussia to the military manœuvres, inflamed with a zeal, he assures us, that has much edified him; nor is he less punctilious in his attendance at theatres, operas, and illuminations. He is vastly proud that at his farewell audience, Frederick condescended to talk with him as all good honest people talk together for half-an-hour during the twilight, and that he (his majesty) called one of his chamber hussars to light up the room, without making any ceremony. He

[1] This Prince Henry of Prussia, the third son of the King Frederick William, and a brother of Frederick the Great, was one of his brother's most able generals. He gained several important victories during the Seven Years' War. He was also a man who had a taste for letters and for the fine arts; and as Sainte Beuve says, he lived in his Castle at Rheinsberg somewhat after the fashion of the Prince de Conti.

would have liked to have seen the Sans Souci philosopher seated by Mme. Necker's side upon a Friday evening. He would have enjoyed it for the philosopher's sake as well as for hers; for he would see the splendour of life in Paris, and she would see him perform his Polish manners and graces,—ceremonies very different from those to which she had been accustomed. "I assure you," he adds, "one little expected to have such a co-partner in the conversation."

If Grimm had been pleased with his co-partner, what must he have thought when a lady was willing so to admit herself? He has hardly made his entrance into Russia, or been able "in adoring the divinity of this empire to fulfil the object of his holy pilgrimage," before he is quite seized with enthusiasm. The wandering life that he has led for some time past is not of his own choosing, but how can he resist the Empress of Russia! Since the Ottoman Porte has not been able to do so, it is not wonderful that he should not have learned the secret. As he had been gradually drawing nearer to the frontiers of the empire, the marks of her goodness, or rather, to speak more correctly and more ridiculously, the attributes of the most delicate friendship were multiplied to excess. "How can all this be kept up round about the throne?" He spends his days in the court of Catherine and in his own study,

almost as though he were at Saint Ouen; and that robs him of the courage to think of the sacrifices that he has made to enjoy such a singular dream. Diderot also ought to think himself happy, for independently of the goodness of a great and charming princess he will have seen the recesses, the laboratories, and all the chemical operations with which a nation is reconstituted, and everything done quietly, so that people shall know nothing about it. The situation of the two friends at Catherine's court will appear more clearly from the following extract of a letter, written, as we may see from the early sentences, after Mme. Necker had reproached Grimm with his long silence:—

St. Petersburg, 13*th November*, 1773.

If you knew, madam, what pleasure there is in reading at St. Petersburg a letter dated from Saint Ouen, I engage that I should have received yours a fortnight earlier. But we well know that you are spiteful, and because my unhappy fate did not allow me to write to you after having assumed the shepherd's dress at Rheinsberg, you have thought that you were justified in allowing me all this time to continue my ordinary occupations. I value spitefulness very highly; I like people to be malicious, and I do not think much of myself, because, amongst other reasons, I cannot hate, or avenge my own self. But you, who are full of justice and generosity, how can you not have thought that, a poor wretch going about from country to country, from ball to ball, from fête to fête, should not have wished to have heard both about you and from you? Mme. Geoffrin thought so, and treated me consequently.

However, I wrote to you before writing to any of my most intimate and my oldest friends, so eager was I to hear from you; and all the former letters—all those that I wrote for the three first months after I left Paris—were upon urgent matters of business. When it is a question of other people's affairs one must either be in bed with fever, or else set about and do them. But I am delighted to have this bone to pick with you. In the first place, madam, because I am very glad to find that there be a fault in you, or rather to be able to mention an instance in which you have not done everything quite perfectly,—for unhappily everything resolves itself to that at last; and secondly, I am charmed to be able to forgive you something to recompense you for the generous pardon you allowed to M. Diderot. I knew myself that you would do so, but I am pleased that the thing is done. I have already told you, madam, he is a lost man if one judges of him by his external appearance according to orthodox principles. You may say, "so much the worse then for his external appearance if he must be judged differently from everybody else." In this you may be quite right; but great minds should grasp and judge of every part of a man who is different from the multitude. It is in this way that the Empress judges of him, and she is as much enchanted as she is astonished. She is fully persuaded, even though I am incessantly telling her that we are all great men, that we should find it difficult to send her from Paris half-a-dozen of his stamp. And with her he is just as odd, just as original, just as much Diderot, as when with you. He takes her hand as he takes yours, he shakes her arm as he shakes yours, he sits down by her side as he sits down by yours; but in this last point he obeys sovereign orders, and, as you may imagine, a man does not seat himself opposite to Her Majesty unless he is so obliged.

I will not tell you of her kindness to me, because I could not do so without great confusion. I got out of the difficulty with the King of Prussia, for we were both playing together,—he as a great king and I as a humble amateur of wisdom. But with the

Empress it is a different matter. As soon as the performance of sitting upon her throne is over, one no longer sees a sovereign in her chamber, but a woman talking, surrounded by a circle of friends. And when, after having fallen from the clouds, one finds oneself admitted into this circle, one necessarily draws a contrast between one's own small merit and the very unexpected change: the parallel is humiliating and discouraging. And my awkwardness was not a little increased by the fact of my having been elected a member of the Imperial Academy of Science at the same time as M. Diderot, as a foreign member. I had not the least suspicion of this trap, and I could not get out of the way. That was perhaps the only moment in which I did not wish to be associated with M. Diderot; but it was a trick played upon me by Count Orloff,[1] who is the principal man in the Academy, and perhaps the Empress had a hand in it.

In return for the news which Grimm sent her from the court of Catherine, Mme. Necker told him everything that was going on in Paris; but her silence as to matters concerning herself, her health, her husband, and her daughter, brought down upon her Grimm's affectionate reproaches, to which she answered pleasingly enough by the following letter:—

I will begin, sir, by telling you again and in all truth that far from having been astonished at your having delayed your last letter, I rather wondered at your diligence; that if I did not answer you at once it was neither from a feeling of revenge nor ingratitude, but from want of leisure and from sickness, and that

[1] Grégory Vladimir Orloff, born in 1734, was one of the instigators of that revolution in the Palace by which Peter III. perished, and which put Catherine II. on the throne. He died in 1783.

I have no right, nor do I arrogate to myself any right, to make any demands upon your friendship except the rights of friendship itself—and, in short, if I make any remarks upon the conduct of others it is because I am in earnest, and only do so when my kindness and my eagerness have been badly rewarded. When they are eight hundred leagues away from each other, friends may make mistakes and may condemn each other unjustly. I was mistaken also in what I thought would interest you. I had intended to give you pleasure by telling you the news of the capital; I should have thought that at St. Petersburg one would have been glad of some verses, and to hear what was going on in the world. I will not tell you therefore that fresh restrictions have been imposed upon printing; that all Paris is divided in opinion between Grétry [1] and Gluck, and that even the most moderate minded men declare that they must draw blood from some one, for either one side or the other; that there is a young man who unassisted reads a play better than it could be played by the best possible actors, and that women are dragged away from the performance either dead or in a dying state; that we expect to see the Emperor here in the spring; that M. de Buffon is publishing a work on the elements and another on the planets, and that he tells us exactly the temperature of each star, and almost the character of the people who live in each; and that the eulogium read upon M. Colbert [2] still continues to have a very great success. But to be even with you, I will tell you that my daughter's masters are very well pleased with her, and that it is a blessing that M. Necker is really getting fat. But now, sir, you must allow that you showed a little temper when you wrote to me. And I am delighted that you did do so. It was the first time you were ever wrong in your life. I may

[1] André Ernest Modeste Grétry, born at Liège in 1741, died in 1813; the author of *Richard Cœur de Lion*, and of other well known operas.

[2] *L'Éloge de Colbert*, by M. Necker, had lately been crowned by the French Academy.

say of you what Mme. Geoffrin says of herself: "Pray for me that I may be wrong, so that I may make amends for my fault." I hope that you will in future like me a little better; and in this pleasing hope I again indulge in the calm air of friendship.

Our society is always the same. We often speak of you; we lament your absence though we know that there is good reason for it. Mme. Geoffrin continues to scold me, to her great satisfaction, and to mine also. The abbé Raynal drives out all the foreigners, even to the very last man. The ambassador (of Naples) laughs and makes others laugh still more. As for me I always listen, but I am nearly the only one who does. M. Necker neither talks nor listens, but he amuses himself by sucking his thumbs. M. Suard catches flies with charming cleverness. We are all waiting for you, and are looking forward with much pleasure to the tales that you will bring home. We will listen to you discoursing upon the laboratory, upon chemical operations, and you will be driven, sir, to confess that if men can be manufactured in a still, it was a woman who first found out the way.

Grimm's return to Paris put an end to his usual correspondence with Mme. Necker; but his philosophical admiration for Catherine remained as warm as before. Ten years later he drew a singular parallel between the modes of government employed by the Empress of Russia and by M. Necker; but it is not impossible that the Empress would not have allowed all the premises laid down:—

In speaking, madam, of my heroine (that is, of course, Catherine), you are also, in a novel way, singing the praises of despotism. But such praise will not make her the more beloved. Perhaps I am the only man in the world who knows exactly the

secret of her form of government, the essence of which is to undermine the very depths of despotism, and to give to her people, as time goes on, the feeling of liberty. I say as time goes on, for it is not possible to ripen this precious fruit more quickly than any other. Whether her project succeeds, or whether it be interrupted and reduced to nothing after her death, it will nevertheless be known when she is no longer upon earth; and the time will come when some guiding spirit will be not a little struck with the great likeness between her system of government and that of M. Necker.

The plan of dividing the empire into twenty-two governments, which she first conceived now twelve years ago, and which she has carried out, executed, and perfected with unparalleled wisdom and consistency of thought, independently of the advantage of making men of every class co-operate together for the public welfare in their respective duties, had no other end in view than that which M. Necker hoped to bring about by the establishment of provincial assemblies. Her realised scheme was not appreciated, because it was made to work among a people not as yet able to calculate the moral consequences of a political operation; but the day will come when the likeness, in two points so dissimilar, between these two individuals who tried to govern their country will be remarked with astonishment.

If Grimm would have us believe him when he says that he is the only being in the world who knew clearly the secret of Catherine's mode of government, he might have done well to explain to us certain episodes in her reign which hardly redound to the honour of his heroine. As regards the scheme for which he would give her credit, to undermine the very depths of despotism, and to give to her people, as time went on, the

feeling of liberty, I am inclined to think that he would have spoken in a different tone during the early days of the French Revolution, when Catherine wrote to him: "of those cobblers and shoemakers who ought to be sent about their business after a few of them had been hanged as an example to the others;" and also when she added this significant phrase: "They may say and do what they like, the world will never be wanting for a master, and with this master, the temporary wrong-doing of one man is better than the wrong-doing of many, who will inflame with passion twenty millions of people for the word liberty, of which they do not possess even the shadow, and after which these mad creatures will rush without ever being able to obtain it." It is true that before long Grimm was as much disenchanted as she was with "the cobblers and shoemakers;" and that a few years later when expressing his sorrow "to have lost the opportunity of getting himself buried," he was lamenting the loss of many other illusions less deep-rooted than those which he always kept as to the Empress Catherine.

Since we find Diderot's[1] name so frequently mentioned by Grimm, it is now time to bring forward the most illustrious of the Friday guests. Nothing short

[1] Diderot was born at Langres in 1712; he died in 1784.

of that fascination which everything appertaining to literature exercised on the mind of Mme. Necker could have determined her not only to receive, but to seek out a writer, whose licentious tales and the boldness of his philosophical treatises ought, one would think, to have made her wish to avoid being in his company. In a letter to Mlle. Voland,[1] Diderot relates how he first made the acquaintance of Mme. Necker, and with what warmth she first received him :—

> Do you know that it is I who might well be vain ? There is here a Mme. Necker—a pretty woman and a wit—and who is tremendously in love with me. She makes assaults on me that I should go to her house. She is a Genevese, a woman who had no money of her own, and whom the banker Necker has raised up to her present exalted position. Some one asked, "Do you think that a woman who owes everything to her husband should fail him ?" and the answer was : "No one more ungrateful in the world." The scamp who made this reply was myself. I was speaking of a woman . . . .

And Diderot ends with one of those jokes—not in the best taste—which occurs frequently enough in his correspondence with Mlle. Voland. Overcome by his thoughtless fatuity, Diderot nearly mistook the marks of

[1] Sophie Voland, born about 1726, died about 1778, owes all her celebrity to the letters written to her by Diderot, and in which, in spite of the efforts of good-natured commentators, there are passages that we cannot interpret as redounding to his honour.

warmth shown to him by Mme. Necker, and which she offered to him as her homage for his talent as a writer. But we must say at once that Diderot very soon learnt to understand and to respect the lady whose acquaintance he had just lately made; and not long afterwards, when writing his *Paradoxe sur le Comédien,* he speaks of her as "a woman who possesses everything that the purity of an angelic soul can add to delicacy of taste." Also, after a short while (and, let him say what he will, not very many assaults were made upon him) he became one of the frequenters of Mme. Necker's *salon,* where he represented with brilliancy and distinction the coterie of the Encyclopædists. Though the members of this party doubtless felt themselves more constrained in Mme. Necker's drawing-room than in that of Mme. Helvétius, or at Baron d'Holbach's, her house nevertheless soon became recognised as one of those where they used to meet, and where some stump oratory was practised. This was the cause of much uneasiness at Geneva; and Moultou, in writing to Mme. Necker, gave her to understand that her old friends, those among whom she had passed her girlhood, feared that the company of the philosophers might perhaps shake her opinions in the doctrines of the Christian faith. Mme. Necker reassured him by this warm protestation:—

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Can you suspect me for an instant? My opinions were born with me when I came into the world, and you think that I can throw them over now when my whole happiness depends upon them. You may tax me with enthusiasm; but is it you who ought to complain because I worship everything that is good? I see some men of letters; but at the outset I let my opinions be known, and consequently such matters are never talked about here in this house. At my age, and in a well-conducted drawing-room, nothing is so easy as to set the tone. . . . I live, it is true, among many atheists, but their arguments have never had the slightest influence upon my mind; and if they have ever reached my heart it was only to make me shrink back from them with horror.

To the reproaches that were often addressed to Mme. Necker because of the society in which she lived, she made one day a charitable and a very happy answer: "I have friends who are atheists; but why not? They are friends who are to be pitied."

Mme. Necker was not satisfied, as she wrote to Moultou, with giving the tone to her society, or by regulating it from time to time, as Mme. Geoffrin did in her own house when she exclaimed, in answer to a bold saying of one of her philosophical friends: "There, that will do." More courageous, or perhaps more eloquent, she would herself encourage discussion, and if we may believe her own testimony, arguments in reply did not fail her. I find among her papers the narrative of a discussion which took place one evening

between herself, Diderot, and Naigeon. Naigeon was the humble and enthusiastic friend of Diderot, and in truth he took small part in the conversation, except by those vivacious exclamations which justified Diderot in nicknaming him "little hurricane Naigeon."[1] Unfortunately one of the sheets upon which the account of this conversation was transcribed has been torn, the beginning of it is missing; and the dialogue, such as I have it, opens by a series of Naigeon's exclamations, uttered in answer to some preceding matter:—

NAIGEON.

Nonsense! fancy! prejudice!

MME. NECKER (without listening to Naigeon).

Monsieur Diderot, let us resume a conversation that interests me, and which makes life more bearable to me.[2] Did you not tell me that it was possible to explain thought by means of the sensations?

NAIGEON.

Yes, certainly; with the greatest clearness; there can be no doubt of it.

DIDEROT.

All nature is but a series of graduated sensations. A stone feels, but very slightly; the plant feels more strongly than the

[1] Jacques André Naigeon, born in Paris in 1738, died in 1810, was a disciple and fanatical admirer of Diderot. He has left some philosophical writings and *Mémoires* on Diderot.

[2] Mme. Necker was subject to pain and to nervous agitation, which she endeavoured to forget by the charms of conversation.

stone; the oyster more so than the plant; and so on, until we come to man. Slight sensations leave behind them no recollection of their existence. The light impression of my finger upon a hard substance cannot preserve its own record; but stronger sensations bring with them their own recollections,—recollections which are nothing else than the thought, or, if you like better, than a durable memory. Matter, therefore, is alone sufficient to explain all these phenomena, and if it is susceptible of sensation it is also susceptible of thought.

"I admit that our ideas come to us from our senses," Mme. Necker answers; "but what do we gather from that?" And she stoutly refutes Diderot's argument in opposing to the variety of our sensations the unity of that existence which receives the tribute of our senses. "I always consider myself as one," she adds, "and the centre of those ideas, whatever it may be, is certainly indivisible."

DIDEROT.

It is a collective sense of all the other senses.

MME. NECKER.

What is then the nature of that sense which contains abstract things, which is tormented by metaphysical reasons, for which the nothing is something, for it distinguishes it from existence; that sense which re-acts upon itself, which forms for itself new thoughts, and which, in spite of the millions of objects which it represents, which it contains, and upon which it acts, always remains one and indivisible? What are the operations of matter which resemble those wonderful actions of our soul? Ah, Monsieur Diderot, let us confess our ignorance. The more knowledge we possess upon these subjects the more am I

persuaded that God has treated the metaphysicians as the architects of Babel, who wished, in spite of their littleness, to ascend up to heaven. He gave to them the gift of language only to confound them by the multiplicity of words, and to prevent them from understanding one another.

The conversation ends here; either because Diderot was worsted in the argument (which is not the most probable reason), or because the warmth shown by the mistress of the house on the subject-matter of discussion, made him think it more prudent not to carry the discussion any farther. But we may see, in spite of what Grimm has said, that Hypatie Necker knew very well what she was saying, and that she could readily put her ideas into intelligible language.

However careful Diderot may have been not to hurt Mme. Necker's religious convictions, and whatever marks of respect he may have shown to her, the friendship was still a strange one that existed between the author of *La Religieuse*, the lover of Mme. de Puisieux [1] and of Mlle. Voland, and the austere and pure-minded woman, whom the slightest shadow of ill report has never touched, and from whose pen cannot be found one word that is not harmless and irreproachable. And

[1] Mme. de Puisieux was a sort of adventuress, with whom Diderot became intimate the year after his marriage. It was to satisfy her incessant demands for money that Diderot published many of his works: among others, *Les Bijoux Indiscrets*, and his Letters on the Deaf and Dumb.

it is strange that Diderot himself should have been the only man to perceive this. The letters which he wrote to Mme. Necker are not only free from those impurities which may be found in all his works, but they are written in a tone of respectful humility which is not usual with him. We may judge by the following, in which he excuses himself from not being able to comply with a request made to him by Mme. Necker to send her a copy of his *Salons*, which was then as yet unpublished :—

MADAM,

The praise which you condescend to bestow upon my small sheets is so flattering to me that I cannot refuse to accept it. You may be sure that it is with much regret that I send back your messenger empty handed ; but I have nothing by me. My friends have robbed me of everything, and it is terrible labour to try to recover anything from them. There is, however, a copyist in the printer's shop ; my poor rags will come back to me, and I will confide them to you openly. How many things are there that would never have been thought or written if I had had the honour to know you sooner. I make bold to think that the purity of your soul might have gone through mine, and that I should then have become a sort of angel. You are right, madam, you are right : an honest man, a man who would leave this world without remorse, a man who can at the last moment recall to mind, without blushing, the whole of his past career,—a man who knows the rightful object of letters, and who does not wish to prostitute his talent,—will write nothing that God nor you may not look upon with complacency. If celestial beings did exist, and if they were hovering round about us when we wrote, by the side of a fine line

which might cause them to smile, they would either withdraw from us, or a tear would fall from their eyes, blotting out the indecent lines which followed;—those pure minds would not have left in my writings anything but that of which you yourself would have approved.

It would seem that the fear of scandalising Mme. Necker was very strong in Diderot's mind, for he again speaks of it, and almost in the same form, in another letter written at a later date:—

I was going to forget to ask your pardon for all the impertinences that you have read in my *Salons*. You may be sure, madam, that I did not wish to fail you, in any sort of way, for I act with my own works in the same way as with those of others. The line that is well written or well reasoned, the mark of imagination, the honest thought—this is the only thing that I recollect, and the only one that I thought to put before you. God was reading one day the life of a good man; that is, a life in which good and bad actions are mixed up together. He had the angel Gabriel on his right hand, and the devil on his left. Satan put his finger upon every wrongful line and smiled; the angel wept, and each one of his tears in falling on the paper wiped out the line which caused Satan to smile. You would have cried too much if every folly on my paper had cost you a tear. Recollect, madam, I am making my confession before you. Recollect that it is I, such as I am, alone, doors and windows closed, without a veil and without shame. Recollect that I have made no pretension in this sonnet, that I have looked for nothing but that which might go down, nor rejected anything which might seem to be bad; that I have written it hindered by no law, free from all constraint, just as a torrent rushes along, dragging with it helter-skelter, trees, plants, animals, and other precious things all covered over with mud.

When you have had copied out those parts which have not displeased you, a very small portion of the whole shapeless mass will remain ; yet that is all that I shall dare to publish. If I did not count upon your indulgence I should be very careful of my own indiscretion. I beg of you not to despise me. It is not the thoughts ; it is the actions which mainly distinguish the good man from the bad. The hidden nature of souls is nearly always the same. It is an obscure cavern inhabited by beasts of every sort, well disposed and evil disposed. The wicked man opens the door of the cavern and heeds only the latter ; the honest man does the contrary. You have wished to penetrate into the cavern, and I have consented. M. Grimm was heedless enough to allow men and women of the highest rank to look in through the bars ; but that does not justify me. If one good thing does not weigh more heavily in the balance of your mind than a hundred bad ones, I am a lost man.

When this manuscript is useless, or has become fastidious to you, pray send it back to me in a sealed cover.

I ask you, madam, on my knees, for a thousand pardons and for a thousand excuses. Add, also, all the ceremony of an *amende honorable*, and then rub your eyes and think no more about it.

When Diderot went with Grimm to Russia, Mme. Necker doubtless expected to receive from him some of those brilliant letters which, in the eighteenth century, ladies liked to read aloud to their guests in their drawing-rooms. But her hopes were not realised. He sent her no account of himself, or of what he did (nor did he send any to his wife and daughter), and Grimm had to make excuses for his friend: "What can you expect from him, madam? His conduct in the most ordinary things of every-day life is totally different from that of every

other human being. He would rather invent a new minuet than dance it like other people." But Diderot repaid Mme. Necker by a long letter which he wrote to her from the Hague, and of which I will give some extracts. After having made a private confession to her that he knows nothing at all about Russia, and that the philosophers who talk of despotism have only seen it through the neck of the bottle, he says: "What a difference there is between a tiger painted by Oudry,[1] and a tiger in his forest!" Then he draws a picture of Catherine II., and we might find it difficult to recognise the dissolute and unscrupulous woman, if we did not know how easy it was in the eighteenth century for a sovereign to dazzle the eyes of a philosopher:—

I have hardly seen any one except the sovereign, and I have done my utmost so that in speaking to you of her you should not at every instant suspect me to be expressing my gratitude for favours received. It may perhaps cost me my fortune, or that of my children—if I wish to be believed—when I tell you that no one is more noble or affable in their demeanour than the Empress; that I do not know of any subject upon which she cannot talk; that she possesses both a sound judgment and ready penetration; that if one feels at first that one is approaching a majesty, it is impossible not to forget it the next minute; that you are not better acquainted with your house and your children than she with her empire and her subjects; that she allows you

[1] Jean Baptiste Oudry, born in Paris in 1686, died in 1755; he was celebrated as a painter of animals.

to ask her questions, and that she does not take it in bad part if she is interrupted, a folly of which I have been guilty more than once; that her heart is both stout and loving; that she is passionately fond of glory, and that she can forego it when success, more easy or more prompt, demands a sacrifice; that she has, when occasions require it, the lively manner of a French woman of good taste and appreciation; that she is like a grand and imposing statue, the fine moulding of which has not been injured, but which has become slightly smeared over with that glaze which has come upon the masterpieces of antiquity in the vase into which they had been thrust by barbarous hands; that no one possesses more perfectly than she does that talent which not only argues a kindness of disposition, but which demands much wit; she can dissimulate anything from you, and yet make you see how it would be displeasing to you; she knows very well how to avoid the question to which she does not wish to have to give an answer—an easy matter with one person, though it may be very difficult with another; she possesses the pride of a Roman lady, and yet she has covered it with all the many seductions of a fascinating woman; one may believe her—for she has had a long trial—when she says that her presence of mind never leaves her in hazardous circumstances; in a word, as any ordinary lady in Paris, she also would have her Saint Ouen, and she would be surrounded by other pleasant women, and by intelligent and well instructed men. I will some day finish for you this sketch, making use of her own words. Indeed I had intended to do so immediately after I left her, lest what she said, if it took up its abode in my head, might degenerate as it became assimilated with the soil of the country.

Diderot then enters into long details as to the effect which the Russian climate, and especially the water of the Neva, had upon his health. Afterwards he again falls back into his enthusiasm:—

I have sworn, and I now make oath a second time, that if, by one of those whims of the old man covered up under his black cape, he who disposes of all the events of this world, he who sees us walk along and laughs at us,—if it should happen that this grand and worthy sovereign should be driven away from her throne, I would not hesitate to return into Russia, and to bring her from the depths of a prison a more flattering homage than that which I have given to her while she was seated upon her throne.

I can neither accept nor refuse the good words which you were so kind to say about me. Think, therefore, madam, what must be the perplexity of him who is obliged to take away from your understanding that which he would accord to your honesty. You read men as I am accused of reading books. It is yourself that you see in them, and you have very good reason to be satisfied :

Rarement à courir le monde
On devient plus homme de bien.

Though I have changed the climate I have not changed my opinions. I still walk on the surface of the globe as though no one was looking at me. I see myself, and when I want support, when I have need of a censor, or a panegyrist, or a witness, I turn to my friend. But you have your eyes turned to heaven ; I look at the Rue Anne,[1] or I instantly go there ; my fetich is there ready at hand.

He then goes into many details about his children, about his own occupations, his own projects ; and he ends by coming back to the thought which is ever

[1] Diderot here alludes to Grimm, who lived in the Rue Sainte Anne. Was it from a feeling of horror or of superstition that he omitted the word *Sainte* ?

uppermost in his mind—what does Mme. Necker think of him ?

He thus concludes his letter :—

Madame Necker, Madame Necker, take care ; you are demoralising me. I am a simple man, and believe easily what is told to me. I would not lessen your praises by one single word if I was quite sure never to undeceive you.

When I call to mind my audacity in showing to you those *Salons*, I cannot bear to think of it. It is as though I had dared to come up to you in church wearing my dressing-gown and my night-cap. But still it is myself, line for line. I did no more than copy myself—altering nothing ; there is not one of my works that is more like me. The metal is unpolished, just as it came out of the mine. If you can extract from it one spangle of gold the merit is yours rather than mine.

It is a matter of regret to me not to have had the happiness of knowing you sooner. You would certainly have given me a taste for purity and a delicacy of feeling which would have made its way from my heart into that which I have written. Those weeds which spring up in our garden are not perhaps without their qualities. They may be more attractive for youth and for vice, but the grown-up girl who is both handsome and modest captivates the right minded man. No comparison can be drawn between the bacchanalian pictures of Rubens or of Jordaens [1] and the virgins of Raphael. I know all this, and I feel it all thoroughly ; but it is too late to adopt this pure and chastely style.

THE HAGUE, *6th September*, 1774.

I do not know anything that redounds more to the honour of Mme. Necker than the respect of a man so

[1] Jacques Jordaens, a Flemish painter, born at Antwerp in 1594 died in 1678.

little respectful as was Diderot, nor anything which does Diderot more honour than this avowal, and this sincere regret for the many impurities which he has thrown here and there into his books. It is the property of high minded souls to raise up to their own level all those who come near to them. There was in Diderot's nature a better foundation than that which we see in his printed works. It shows itself in his letters to Mme. Necker; and we find in him the same impression that was made on the man, who, reading again some years before his death a certain passage in *Seneca* upon the bad employment of time, said to himself: "I have never been able to read this passage without blushing; it is the story of my own life."

CHAPTER VII.

D'ALEMBERT—MADEMOISELLE DE LESPINASSE—THE ABBÉ GALIANI—BERNARDIN DE SAINT-PIERRE—DORAT.

DIDEROT was not the only champion of the *Encyclopédie* who came into Mme. Necker's drawing-room; he had a second in the person of d'Alembert.[1] Mme. Necker had probably known d'Alembert when he lived close to her own door in the Rue Michel le Comte, with his old nurse Mme. Rousseau, and before he had made up his mind to share the apartment of Mlle. de Lespinasse[2] in the Rue de Bellechasse. But from whatever date their acquaintance may have begun, d'Alembert

[1] D'Alembert was a natural son of Mme. de Tencin and the Chevalier Destouches. He was born in Paris in 1717. He had first received the name of Jean Lerond because he had been left upon the steps of a church, now pulled down, that was called St. Jean le Rond. He died in the year 1783.

[2] Mlle. de Lespinasse was the adulterine child of the Marquise d'Albon. She was born in Burgundy in the year 1733, and died in Paris in 1776.

never became so intimate in Mme. Necker's house as did Marmontel or Diderot. Of a poor and somewhat cold disposition (not that he was altogether incapable of deep feeling) d'Alembert belonged too exclusively to her, who, not to his knowledge though under his eyes, divided her heart between M. de Mora[1] and M. de Guibert,[2] to leave either much of his time or much of his affection at his own disposal. The remnants, such as they were, belonged to Mme. Geoffrin; Mme. Necker stood only third upon the list. And the letters exchanged between Mme. Necker and d'Alembert show that they had each hardly got beyond the expressions of courteous indifference. D'Alembert once sent to her the manuscript of his *Éloges,* together with a few modest little speeches, and he excuses himself for "presenting himself in his dressing-gown—and in a dressing-gown that is torn and full of holes." Again, he narrates to Mme. Necker the events of the time,—the first representation of an opera of Gluck, for instance, as to which he says, like M. Jourdain, "*qu'il y a trop de tin-*

[1] The Marquis de Mora, whom Mlle. de Lespinasse threw over for M. de Guibert, was the son of the Comte de Fuentès, the Spanish ambassador in Paris.

[2] Jacques Antoine Hippolyte, Comte de Guibert, was born at Montauban in 1748, and died in Paris in 1786. He published several works that at the time excited much enthusiasm. Among others may be mentioned an *Essai général de tactique*, and a tragedy, *Le Connétable de Bourbon.*

tamarre là-dedans;" or he merely recommends her such a one as a writing-master for her daughter. When Mme. Necker heard of the death of M. de Mora she wrote to Mlle. de Lespinasse expressing her sorrow, and d'Alembert answers her in the lady's name, with an almost laughable pathos, for the affliction of which he was a witness. He little thought that in the affliction remorse had a very much larger share than sorrow.

PARIS, *Saturday, 4th June.*

I have read, madam, your letter to Mlle. de Lespinasse. She was moved with the deepest and most affectionate gratitude. She is herself unable to express to you how highly she values the marks of your sympathy. Her health is much shaken; she is so broken that she cannot enjoy even the consolations of friendship. That friendship which I have for her makes me share all her feelings; that is to say, madam, that I am myself very unwell, and in a very poor condition. For my own part I regret the loss of him who had a most kind, a most virtuous, and a most noble heart; his memory, and the sorrow I feel for him, will be ever engraven upon my mind. Your goodness and your kindness tell me that I am giving you a proof of my attachment and of my respect in speaking to you of that which afflicts me so deeply. Pray consider that this letter is addressed both to you and to M. Necker, who I hope will accept the assurance of my respect.

Two years later Mlle. de Lespinasse succumbed herself, and d'Alembert, then suffering from the only real sorrow that he ever felt, wrote to Mme. Necker in

an affectionate and impassioned tone which contrasted strongly from that of his ordinary correspondence :—

Wednesday Evening.

How kind you are, madam, both you and M. Necker, to think of me in my present state of grief. I have lost all the sweetness and all the interest of my life; I care now for nothing more than the sorrowful and drear occupation of carrying out the last wishes of my unfortunate friend. When I shall have accomplished this unhappy task—a task that is sacred to me—I shall have no other feeling but that of abandonment and void, and existence would not be tolerable but for the sympathy of some kind and affectionate friends. I include your sympathy, madam, and also that of M. Necker; and on this ground I would ask for the continuation of the kindness which you have both shown to me. It will be more necessary and more dear to me now than ever. It will make me feel, thinking of past times, how much gratitude I owe to you, and of all the sentiments of respect and of attachment you have put into my heart.

A few months after the death of Mlle. de Lespinasse, Mme. Geoffrin was troubled with fits of depression, giving her warning that her end was not far distant; and her daughter then determined no longer to admit her friends, the philosophers. It was Mme. Necker that d'Alembert again chose as his confidante to whom he wished to express his sorrows :—

Though I have resolved, madam, to return to my old mode of life, which, sad as it is, is still more suitable than any other to a man in my health and in my situation, I hoped to have the honour of seeing you to-day, a pleasure which I have not enjoyed for a long time past. But Mme. Geoffrin's unfortunate condition does

not allow me to think of anything else, and I am, therefore, at the same time deprived of the pleasure of your society. Am I condemned, madam, to lose everything all at once? I may say with Orestes—

"Grâce aux Dieux! Mon malheur passe mon espérance."

I saw her yesterday evening in a state of weakness which made me wish to be in her place, but I did not dare to wish that she were in mine. I would not take the liberty of speaking to you of this new trouble but that I know that your friendship for Mme. Geoffrin will make you share it with me. Accept my excuses, my regrets, and the assurance of my kind respect.

Although these letters of d'Alembert are not free from a certain declamatory style, nevertheless it seems to me that there is conveyed in them an air of truth that somewhat reconciles us to that honourable but unsympathetic personage.

Since the name of Mlle. de Lespinasse has naturally fallen in with that of d'Alembert, the reader may perhaps be pleased to see the droll letter—tinctured however with a tone of melancholy—in which she thanks M. Necker for sending her his little work, *Le Bonheur des Sots*:—

Tuesday, 6 *o'clock in the evening.*

You preach, sir, the ninth beatitude better than the Gospel preaches the eight others. But you may preach now as you like. Your book has condemned you to everlasting misfortune. I have never met with such good fun, in which there is also so much sound truth; it is as philosophical and as amusing as *Candide*. I thought that human mortals were wretched enough,

but you show me that there are a good many happy creatures upon this earth, though you do not give me much wish to remain among them. I should find in life all that was charming, pleasant, and agreeable, if you would afford me a few moments' entertainment. Your volume was brought to me but ten minutes ago, and I have already devoured it. I am going to begin it again; but I will wait for M. d'Alembert, who, I am sure, will share my pleasure with me.

Mme. Necker's *salon* had become the rendezvous of many foreigners who came to Paris to enjoy the delights of the city, and also of the representatives of the various European sovereigns whose diplomatic functions made it necessary for them to live there permanently. Among these foreign guests on the Friday evenings might be seen the English ambassador, Lord Stormont, a man who was known in society as *le bel Anglais;* the ambassador of Sweden, le Comte de Creutz,[1] who was the first victim of that playful joke when after the voyage of Gustavus III. people in France passed themselves off as belonging to the Swedish nobility; the Neapolitan ambassador, the fat and popular Marquis Caraccioli,[2] who, when he was appointed viceroy

[1] Gustave Philippe, Comte de Creutz, born in 1726, died in 1785, was the Swedish ambassador in Paris from 1772 to 1784. He left a certain reputation in Sweden as a poet.

[2] Dominique, Marquis Caraccioli, born in 1715, died in 1789. He came of an illustrious Neapolitan family, and he acquired for himself in society a great reputation as a wit. Dorat wrote a book which he called *L'Esprit de Caraccioli.*

of Sicily left Paris with so many regrets, and replied to the king, who complimented him upon the splendour of his new place: "Ah! sire, I am obliged to leave the finest place in all the world, the Place Vendôme." But of all the foreigners he who made the most brilliant figure in Mme. Necker's drawing-room was the abbé Galiani.[1]

During the ten bright years of his sojourn in Paris—the only years of his life, he said, in which he really lived—from 1759 to 1769, the jolly abbé, whom the Neapolitan government strangely appointed to the post of secretary to the embassy, charmed every one by his sallies; and as soon as Mme. Necker first opened her *salon* he became one of her most assiduous guests. He did not there find himself obliged as at Baron d'Holbach's to hold his own in argument—poor weak soul as he was—against a whole company of atheists, and to demonstrate to them the existence of God by the celebrated argument of the *dés pipés.* In a discussion of this nature the mistress of the house would have sided with him, and he might consider himself as safe. But these abbés of the eighteenth century were so

[1] The abbé Galiani was born at Chieti (Abruzzo Cistra) in 1728, and died at Naples in 1787. The *Dialogues sur le Commerce des Blés,* which he published during his stay in Paris, had a very great success, and at one time was upon the table in every house.

exacting that each one of them had his own complaint. The abbé Morellet reproached Mme. Necker because she forbade her guests to discuss religious questions. The abbé Galiani found fault with her because "she possessed virtue, and because she maintained the cold demeanour of decency." In this respect he doubtless found himself more at ease, à la Chevrette, at Mme. d'Epinay's. But when he had left Paris, "the only place," he cries in despair, "in which people would listen to me," and when he had got back to Naples, from whence he did not return, it is wonderful to see how his complaints dwindle away, and how his sorrow predominates. We may judge of his state of mind from some extracts of his letters, as light-headed and as witty as he was himself, and which I am prevented from giving in their entirety because of their great length. As soon as he had reached Genoa, the first halting-place on his return journey, he sits down to write to Mme. Necker, and thus he lays bare all his grief:—

GENOA, 28*th August*, 1769.

A plague upon all sentiment! If I have got any, may God forgive me; that is not the article with which I am best provided. I have, in truth, got very little; but you, madam, you have got a devil's burden of it. Your charming letter of the 29th has only that fault. You still talk to me of sentiment. Why do you not talk to me of slippers? What danger is there? I am in Genoa, and you are in Paris. Do you know that if you

continue to talk in that way I may perhaps think of you during the day, but I shall not dream about you at night.

You see how gay I am. Don't believe it. I am sad and downhearted, and I am very sorry to tell you so. I try to distract my thoughts, but I fall into the opposite excess, that of foolish laughter. I amuse every one here but myself. The moment I think of Paris and of my friends I am lost. I am not there, and you are. These are two reasons for my sad and unhappy reflections. "But you will go back," they say to me. Who can tell? "But you will not die in Paris?" That is true, but the thought is not consoling. "But you are not dead?" Again, that is true. "But you will do there as do the devils in hell?" This is sad, but it is the only resource in hell, and the only consolation of those who go there. But, good heavens, what a lamentable letter I am writing to you! Let me return to the slippers. . . . The abbé Morellet has been bitten with jealousy; Suard has been stung with it, and Thomas has been scratched. What a niggardly fellow this is! Like a new Demosthenes with his lantern in his cave at Madrid,[1] which one day will be as good as that in Athens, he is tranquil and sure, and has a self-confidence which makes me fret with impatience. If I came back again I would make him shake in his shoes; but I shall not come back. Ah, wretch that I am! what a note have I touched upon! This doubt ever keeps running in my head, and this doubt makes me despair; it kills me. Well, let us now talk of something else.

. . . . Has Mlle. Clairon[2] returned? It is one grief less

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[1] The reader will recollect that before buying his house at Saint Ouen, M. Necker had taken upon a lease the Château de Madrid.

[2] Claire Josephine Legris de la Tude, known under the name of Clairon, was born at Saint Waron de Condé in 1723, and died in Paris in 1803. She had left the stage in 1765; but Mme. Necker, who had heard her when she first came to Paris, still maintained her great admiration for her talents, and asked her occasionally to act in her drawing-room.

to me to know that she is away from Paris at the same time as I am. I need not ask you if she still remembers me. I am sure she does. Mlle. de Lespinasse will remember me also; for she is pretty, honest, has a very good memory, has read much, has many acquaintances, and for her I am a book which she once read without feeling tired with it. Mme. Geoffrin . . . . No, I will not talk of her. I am not yet strong enough. I may talk of Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault (Mme. Geoffrin's daughter). She loves me and I love her, as the angels love each other, according to what Saint Thomas says—not your Thomas, but one who was a much better theologian, and who discovered that the angels loved each other just as well when they were far away from each other as when they were side by side, without being able to see or to talk to each other. They must be very happy if they can get any pleasure out of that.

You promised me that you would write to me often. Will you keep your word? Write to me here by the post directly; but commission some one to address the envelope. Your letters are like Socrates, the most lovely soul in the most hideous body. Your letters are also as beautiful as the envelope is ugly. I say that to please the abbé Morellet, not to humiliate you. It would not be in your nature to address an envelope neatly. Such a matter-of-fact undertaking would not be compatible with the sublimity of your too glorious transcendentalism. Now my paper is beginning to run short. Do not forget my compliments to my dearest friend, M. Necker. I love him infinitely; and I do not say this to oblige you. I say it because I feel it. I shall be abused because I have not yet sent a word to the incomparable Marmontel, and to ever so many others; but the recollection of them is the cause of my unhappiness, and one ought not to be unhappy.

Ah! that slipper. Happy shoemaker!

Then by slow stages the abbé arrives at last at Naples. He was not the man to cry *Veder Napoli, poi*

mori! At the foot of Vesuvius he is again haunted with reminiscences of Paris, and he cannot restrain himself from writing to Mme. Necker. After having begun "plainly and flatly" by asking her for news of herself, and if it be true that she is going to have a baby, he gives way to the expression of his sorrows, and draws an animated picture, in which he paints in strong colours both Mme. Necker's *salon* and himself:—

A Friday does not pass by but I go to you in spirit. I arrive, and I find you one minute adjusting your dress; the next minute you are lying upon the *duchesse.* I seat myself at your feet. Thomas groans to himself silently; Morellet storms with passion; Grimm and Suard laugh heartily; and my dear friend Creutz perceives nothing. Marmontel thinks that the example ought to be followed; and you, madam, you make two of your most graceful virtues, modesty and politeness, war against each other; in the meanwhile you think that I am a little monster, more embarrassing than hateful. Dinner is announced. We go out; the others eat meat, I abstain. But while I am admiring the ardour with which the abbé Morellet cuts up the turkey, I eat so much of that Scotch green cod-fish, of which I am very fond, that I get a fit of indigestion. We rise from table and drink our coffee, every one speaking at the same time. The abbé Raynal agrees with me that Boston and English America is for ever separated from England; and at the same moment Creutz and Marmontel agree that Grétry is the Pergolese of France. M. Necker thinks it is all very well; he drops his head and goes away. Such are my Fridays. Do you see me in your house as plainly as I see you? Have you as much imagination as I have? If you see me, if you are now touching me, you will

feel that at this moment I am tenderly kissing your hand. But you are laughing at me? Adieu, then, I am happy.

But he did not altogether forgive Mme. Necker for having "maintained the cold demeanour of decency" towards him; and after two years he wrote to her reproaching her for her silence.

NAPLES, *6th July*, 1771.

MY DIVINITY!

At last a letter from you has reached me. If this continues I do not ask for anything more from the goddess of friendship. According to what you say in your letter, you still maintain your principles; so much the better for M. Necker, and so much the worse for the others. However, your letter gave me great pleasure, for it proved that I was the Hector of this Troy, and that

"Si Pergama dextra
Defendi possent, etiam hac defensa fuissent."

If the thing had been feasible I would have done it. Let us rejoice, then, and triumph in the general overthrow.

You tell me that all your pleasures are being reduced to conversation. I am sorry for you; for conversation is dying out in Paris, and soon will be altogether dead. *Curæ leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent.* The French talk and sing when some one pinches them; they are silent, as one might expect, when they are knocked down. For my own part, it is now two years since I have heard any conversation. In default of other rational animals, I associate with a cat. At the present moment he is ill. If you know how strong are domestic griefs you may judge of my affliction. I have learnt cat language since I left Paris, and for a man I talk it with tolerable fluency. If you come to see me, instead of saying to you, "I adore you, I am pining away, I am dying," and a hundred other imbecilities in the human tongue

I would say, *Miaôu.* I should then have amply expressed myself, and even with a certain energy. The thing is to know how you would answer. Would you say in a low tone, like that of a pretty lady cat, *Mie, mieù, mioù?* or would you hiss as a wild and savage cat? You know you risk nothing in talking to me in this way when there are two hundred leagues between us. Neither your claws nor mine are long enough. But *revenons à nos moutons.*

I have made all the use I could of your charming letter. I showed it to Baron Gleichen. He answered as did La Fontaine when he heard of the choice made for Racine's burial-place, that you would never have told me as much all the time I was in Paris. We were both very sorrowful, even unto tears; and in singing your praises my refrain was, it is a pity she has so many good principles in her head and no inconsequence in her heart. I recollected that fearful and ever memorable evening when I was declared a monster because I dared to say what every one else thought: I said that I liked men only for their money, and M. Necker is rich; I said that I liked women only for their beauty, and you are pretty. In other words, I said that I liked the master and the mistress of the house, and therefore I was declared to be a monster. You were scandalised, Mme. Suard was astonished, and Mme. la gouvernante du Louvre[1] was indignant. The town shook with the noise of it, the faubourgs were loud in their complaint, the kingdom was in a state of combustion, and yet all the world forgave me. And God too forgives me for having then coveted the money and the wife of my neighbour, for we are now no longer in each other's company. The Alps separate us. But neither time nor the Alps efface from my memory those delightful hours which I passed in your house. Here now is sadness and spleen coming back upon me. Let us talk of something else.

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[1] By the title gouvernante du Louvre was meant a friend of Mme. Necker, Mme. de Marchais, whom we shall meet presently.

I reproach myself every day for not yet having written to Mlle. Clairon. She is one of those persons who really loved me better than did any one else in the world. I always felt it, and I should be glad that she should know it. Would you be so kind as to tell her so? I often dream of her and of her friends. I do not speak of her so often; for to whom should I talk? I live with people who every now and then ask me what the queen of France is doing (that is literally and accurately true). They forget that they went into mourning for her three years ago. Ah! madam, what a desert it is among fifty thousand Neapolitans. M. Necker wrote to me about some business about four months ago. . . . I answered by a long and grand letter. Did he get it? I do not at all know. Would you tell me if he did?

Grimm is still alive. Suard translates after his own fashion,[1] and is inaccurate. I like him better when he works upon his own ideas. Morellet certainly will not now maintain any theory upon exportation, nor upon privileges, nor upon oil paintings, nor upon restrictions upon the freedom of trade. Who is it that complains of scratches in the middle of a battle-field? Do you advise me to write to Mme. Geoffrin? I should much like to do so. I am so crazy, and she is so prudent. Still I like her, I esteem her, I reverence her, I adore her; and if any one would listen to me I would continually speak of her. Tell her so, at any rate; and tell me how her Wednesdays are going on. I cannot bear to call to mind the strong picture of recollections that are still fresh in my memory. My head is now as a magic lantern. I must leave you; and I embrace M. Necker and you also, if you will allow me to do so.

The correspondence of the abbé Galiani does not go on beyond this date. I cannot tell if other letters that

[1] Suard had just published a translation of Robertson's *Life of Charles the Fifth*, and he was editing the *Gazette de France*, together with the abbé Arnaud.

he may have written were destroyed, or if the correspondence then ceased. It may be that Mme. Necker thought that the abbé carried his love of jesting a little too far. When she was a girl she would have taken these transalpine declarations all in good part, but now that she was living in a state of society which she knew to be corrupt there were certain subjects upon which she would not allow familiarity. As a matter of fact, Mme. d'Epinay was a more suitable correspondent for Galiani, and it is not wonderful that to her only was given the privilege of keeping up a correspondence with the petulant abbé.

Mme. Necker found for her guests other amusements than inviting them to dinner, and providing for them afterwards that brilliant and happy conversation which she knew so well how to direct, though perhaps with some visible effort. Sometimes she let them hear Mlle. Clairon, who had retired from the theatre, and for whom Mme. Necker had kept her old passionate enthusiasm; sometimes she tried to give them the pleasure—one that was common enough in the eighteenth century—of hearing extracts of a new work read aloud in her drawing-room. This kind of pleasure is always dangerous, for it may happen that both the reader and his listeners find themselves to be extremely embarrassed. In readings of this sort

it is uncommon that the feeling of confusion that comes from failure should rest with the company; but still such a misadventure did actually take place in Mme. Necker's drawing-room. The intense boredom that was felt at the time of the first reading of *Paul et Virginie* is now so well known as to have become one of those classical anecdotes always remembered, and often quoted to console unlucky authors in their misfortunes. I have searched in the many documents that have come before me for some trace of this anecdote, but I can find none. But I have found two letters of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre,[1] anterior to the publication of *Paul et Virginie*, written in those years of his life when, restless, needy, and tormented, not less by his own disposition than by his genius, he used to knock at every door, and at Rousseau's as well as at those of the Encyclopædists. The first of these letters is very short; he sent it together with his *Voyage à l'Ile de France.* "It is not," he says, "a homage that he pays to Mme. Necker's beauty, it is *an exercise which he offers to her sensibility.*" I will publish the second letter in its entirety, and we shall then see Bernardin de Saint Pierre distrusting as yet his own genius, and at the same time proposing to write a history of William Tell. He asks M. Necker to let him

[1] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, born at Havre in 1731, died in 1814.

see his report upon the India Company (in which company he was soliciting for himself a vacant post), and also from time to time he draws comparisons between Mme. Necker and Venus :—

MADAM,

If you have at the end of this week, or at the commencement of the week following, a day in which you are not over occupied with business, or with pleasure—if on this day there be a quarter of an hour in which you could draw yourself away from M. Necker, I beg that you will be good enough to accord it to me. I have discovered in some old papers a manuscript, as to which I would like to consult some one of intelligence, one who had taste, and above all things, one who was honest. I cannot, madam, apply to any one more competent than you are—you, who think so nobly, and who write so well. If I could trust to my own talents I might employ my spare time in writing some chapter in history; and in my opinion one of the finest subjects would be that of your own countryman, William Tell, for it was he who brought about the revolution in Switzerland. But how can I get the materials? and especially, how can I learn the manners, and the customs, and the nature of a country which I have never seen. It is in this that you and M. Necker may assist me, provided that you think that I have talent enough to enable me to succeed, and that you have sufficient regard for me to tell me so.

I think that next Friday your company will be very numerous. I fancy there is a whole party already made up of ladies, and of the wits, and of other pleasant people. They are perfectly right. Paphos was certainly not more charming than Saint Ouen, and Venus resembled you very closely, excepting in that she had black eyes, and yours are as blue as those of Minerva.

The world here thinks that the comet will come to-morrow. There are churches in which the confessionals are never empty,

and the people are very uneasy to know whether the earth will be burned up, or whether it will be drowned. To-morrow we shall know all about it.

I shall be much obliged to M. Necker if he will lend me his report on the India Company.[1] I think that I shall have time to read it. At any rate, I should like to have it very much; I have heard it so well spoken of, and I have such a good opinion of his taste, that I shall esteem very highly this mark of his confidence.

Accept, madam, the feelings of respect and of attachment with which I have the honour to be your very humble and very obedient servant,

DE SAINT-PIERRE.

PARIS, 11*th May*, 1773.
(Hôtel de Bourbon, Rue de la Magdelaine.)

In the conversation that took place at Mme. Necker's on the Friday evenings, we may imagine that there was much debating as to what went on inside the walls of the French Academy. Nearly all the male frequenters of her *salon* were members, and, naturally enough, they took advantage of these constant meetings to consult together as to the prizes they were obliged to distribute (and in these contests M. Necker was twice honoured), or upon the discourses they had heard delivered. A reception at the Academy was not a small matter at a time when the noise made by the smallest literary event was louder than that of a battle. In those days acts of boldness which now

[1] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was at that time soliciting to be sent out to India by land upon a mission of observation and discovery.

would seem to us as so many commonplaces, were declaimed and welcomed with public applause, in that elegant and rather solemn style which we should be most unwise in wishing to abolish from our more modern form of literature,—that style in which our grandfathers used to take a pride because of its magniloquence. But an election of a new member was a very important matter indeed. The French Academy, which has had, like every other power that has ever existed, its hours of popularity and of disfavour, was then at its zenith. In the battle then being fought by the philosophers and the men of letters against the antiquated formula of a society which they did not think was so near to its deathbed, an academical chair was considered as a ladder from which it was more convenient and more safe to hurl down thunders and to deliver oracular judgments. As soon, therefore, as one of these posts became vacant, the competition was fierce, and Mme. Necker, from her position, was always made acquainted with all the ins and outs of the literary contests. Marmontel took care that she knew of his efforts in favour of the abbé Maury against Target,[1] and Buffon made her his confidante in

[1] Target was born in Paris in 1733, and died there in 1806. He made for himself a great reputation at the bar. He was admitted into the French Academy in 1785, and under the Empire he became a member of the Cour de Cassation.

the anger he felt against Bailly [1] because he would persist in voting for Sedaine.[2]

The fact of having information upon such matters, and having influence in determining others, is often one and the same thing; and therefore it came to pass that people attributed to Mme. Necker an exercise of power in determining the academical elections, at least as great as that which had formerly been used by Mme. de Lambert [3]—of whom the Marquis d'Argenson [4] said that a man had little chance of being accepted by the Academy unless he had been presented by her, or had

[1] Sylvain Bailly, born in Paris in 1736, a member of the Académie des Sciences, Mayor of Paris in 1789, died on the scaffold the 11th of November, 1793.

[2] Michel Jean Sedaine, born in Paris in 1719, died in 1797, was the author of *La Gageure Imprévue*, and of *Le Philosophe sans le Savoir*.

[3] Anne Thérèse de Marguenat (or Le Marguenat) de Courcelles, born in Paris in 1647, died in 1733. She had married the Marquis de Lambert, an officer of merit, and who afterwards became a lieutenant-general. Until close upon her death Mme. de Lambert kept a *bureau d'esprit*, as was then the expression, of which Fontenelle, La Motte, and d'Argenson were prominent members. It was she who gave to her son the witty piece of advice: "My son, do not commit any follies but those which give you pleasure." But in the *Lettres d'une mère a sons fils*, which she also wrote, we find moral precepts of a higher kind.

[4] René Louis Voyer, Marquis d'Argenson, was born in 1694; in 1744 he became Minister for Foreign Affairs; he died in 1757. Besides his *Mémoires*, published in 1835, he has left *Leçons d'un Ministre d'État*. At Court he was called d'Argenson *la bête*, to distinguish him from his brother, the Comte d'Argenson, to whom he was in no way inferior, but who was considered a man more agreeable in company.

been received as a guest in her house. More than one anxious candidate might well have asked himself if he had the good-will of those he met in Mme. Necker's drawing-room, or with what tactics he might besiege the mistress of the house, so as to gain her over to his side. Such was the case with Dorat, the versatile and unhappy Dorat,[1] whose five comedies, six tragedies, five poems, five novels, and an innumerable number of worse than light-headed small pieces, have barely saved his name from oblivion. When he entered his name as a candidate for the Academy, Dorat found that his strongest enemies were some of the Encyclopædists who were habitual guests in Mme. Necker's drawing-room. He therefore addressed himself to her to overcome their hostility; and I give his letter at length because it shows fairly well how firmly was established in less than six years after her marriage the literary credit of the lady who had once enjoyed the honour of being the president of the small *Académie de la Poudrière* :—

I have so much confidence in your goodness, madam, that I do not fear to lay my case before you. I should like better

[3] Claude Joseph Dorat was born in Paris in 1734 ; he died in 1780. Fortunately for him and for his reputation, there is a particular edition of his *Baisers*, enriched with engravings, that is now considered as a book of great value by the bibliophiles.

to be under an obligation to you than to any one else, and that is the reason why I expose myself with a feeling of security. You know most of the Academicians. Those gentlemen have as much deference for your good taste as they have pleasure in being in your company; and if you would in their presence support my candidature I am sure that their prejudices would not prevail against anything you might say in my favour. I have been writing for the last twelve years, and the public welcomes my labour in a kindly spirit. My relations made me quit a career in which I should now have been well advanced. I hoped to find a recompense in literature, and thus to make good again all that I had lost. But this was not the case. I met with cruel opposition, and for what reasons I cannot tell. Civil manners, sincerity in behaviour, and other advantages which are not of much value when they are not accompanied with other merits, but which ought to be esteemed more highly than all the rest—these are accounted as nothing; my faults are remembered, my claims are denied, and it has nearly happened that a man was preferred to me who is known only by his evil deeds, by his having been ruined, and by a falseness of manner all the more blamable inasmuch as it carries with it the semblance of honesty. I open my heart to you, it is honest; and yours, madam, is also too true to refuse to hear in evidence the wrongs that have been brought against me. Who is the Academician that can say aught against me? I am the friend of some and the admirer of others. In my works I have spoken their praises repeatedly. And if you will interest yourself in my favour, madam, you will not stand alone. The Prince Louis,[1] M. Duclos,[2]

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[1] This was the famous Cardinal de Rohan, whom the affair of the necklace rendered so celebrated. Before his promotion to the cardinalship he was known by the name of *Prince Louis.*

[2] Charles Pineau Duclos, born at Dinan in 1704, died in Paris in 1772, author of *Les Mémoires secrets sur les règnes de Louis XIV. et Louis XV.*

and the abbé Voisenon[1] have already more than once declared themselves on my side. M. Thomas cannot go against me; MM. Marmontel and Saurin have no reason to spite me; and one word from you will make them give me their vote. I know that the abbé Delille[2] is mentioned; but he is younger than I am. He has only written a translation; and though I may agree as to his merits—of which indeed I am a very warm admirer—I think that he may yet wait a while without having any reason to complain. Pardon me, madam, for all these details. I shall take no further steps in the matter until I have received your answer. If you think that I may present myself, I will consent to run the risk; otherwise I will be silent as to my desires and my aspirations, and to console myself I shall have the pleasure of thinking that I was guided by your good counsel.

20th June, 1774.

I do not know whether Mme. Necker gave her assistance to Dorat, to whom it would seem that she had shown some degree of friendship, but the assistance, if it were given, proved inefficacious, for Dorat was never a member of the French Academy. He consoled himself, or affected so to do, by the thought that Mme. Necker had been favourable to his candidature; and a few days afterwards he wrote to her:—"I

[1] Claude Henri Fusée, abbé de Voisenon, born in the château de Voisenon, near Melun, in 1708, died in 1775, was the author of some *Poésies légères* and of some *Contes*, which have lately been reprinted.

[2] The abbé Jacques Delille, born at Aigueperse in 1738, died in Paris in 1813. His translation of the *Georgics* appeared in 1769, but he was not elected a member of the Academy until 1774.

shall never be an Academician, but I shall be one of your friends, and I will never do anything to make me unworthy of being so considered. I would rather have a good name than an arm-chair, and your suffrage than those of the forty."

Hitherto, I have spoken only of the men of letters and the philosophers who frequented the *salon* of Mme. Necker. I must now complete the picture of the society with which she was surrounded, by speaking of some of her more intimate friends, and first, of the women whose names are well known: Mme. Geoffrin, Mme. du Deffand, Mme. d'Houdetot;—and among the men, those who, like Thomas and Buffon, always had their place in the history of her life as well as in her heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LADIES:—MADAME DE VERMENOUX—MADAME GEOFFRIN—LA MARÉCHALE DE LUXEMBOURG—LA DUCHESSE DE LAUZUN.

"Ladies," Mme. Necker said, in her somewhat ornamental language, "are in conversation as those light layers of cotton-wool in a box packed with porcelain; we do not pay much attention to them, but if they were taken away everything would be broken." The reader will have perceived, after what has been already said of the *salon* of Mme. Necker, that "those light layers of cotton-wool"—to maintain her curious simile—were altogether wanting, and that the Friday receptions at the Hôtel Leblanc presented the severe aspect of a reunion of friends into which ladies were not admitted. If the truth must be told, among those men of letters who visited Mme. Necker's house some were not married, and there were others who were not anxious that their wives should be seen with them in

public. Poor Mme. Diderot[1] would not have added much to the ornament of any lady's drawing-room; Mme. Marmontel[2] was not a woman of many accomplishments; and little Mme. Suard,[3] meek and grateful for the kindness shown to her by the Neckers, was almost the only lady who accompanied her husband on the Friday evening. It was an easier matter for Mme. Necker to give supper to the philosophers than to induce the women of quality, to speak the language of the time, to come to her house. Although a general progress in ideas and a relaxation of the social hierarchy was already taking place in the latter years of the eighteenth century, although the society of men of letters, that of the farmer-generals, and that of the nobles, was gradually tending towards confusion, there

[1] Diderot had married in 1744 Marie Antoinette Champion, who was then thirty-two years of age. Between Mme. de Puisieux and Mlle. Voland, Mme. Diderot held but a small place in her husband's life; and in his correspondence he rarely speaks of her unless it be to make her appear in some ridiculous situation.

[2] When Marmontel was fifty-four years of age, he married a niece of the abbé Morellet, who was then nineteen, and with whom he was very much in love. As we have seen, Mme. Marmontel pretended that she did not at all like the Neckers; but this in no way prevented her from harassing them with solicitations in favour of her relations.

[3] Amélie Panckoucke, born in 1750 at Lille, sister of Charles Joseph Panckoucke, the celebrated printer, married, in 1775, Jean Baptiste Antoine Suard, and died in Paris in 1830. She has published different works, among others *Les lettres d'un jeune lord à une réligieuse italienne*, and an *Essai de Mémoires* upon her husband.

was still much inequality subsisting under the deceitful aspect of acquaintanceship. As we read *Les Confessions* we cannot help being struck with the different demeanour of Rousseau when in the society of Mme. d'Epinay, and in that of the Maréchale de Luxembourg, and also not to remark how much more subservient he was in the presence of the guests at Montmorency than when in the company of Mme. d'Epinay's friends at the Chevrette. But it was more especially among ladies that the differences of social condition were strongly felt, and that the barriers of etiquette were difficult to pass. Before Mme. Necker could invite into her society people of the best company, she had to wait until she had been first received by them, and a few years had to elapse before her engaging manners, her wit, and her well-known talents proved sufficient to lay open before her every door.

When Mme. Necker, quite a young woman, first made her entry into a society in which she was altogether unknown, she wanted in reality that sort of protection which could have been given to her by a lady of good position who would direct her first steps, and take her, so to say, under her patronage. She might perhaps have found this good-natured guidance in the Duchesse d'Enville, who seemed to show to her, when she was staying with Mme. de Vermenoux,

as warm a welcome as she had done previously on the banks of the Lake of Geneva. But in addition to the general freedom of her mind, her friendship with Voltaire, her strongly marked predilections in favour of the philosophers, and also the fact that the Duchesse d'Enville was regarded with a rather suspicious eye by some of her friends, it would seem that after her marriage Mme. Necker wished to maintain a sort of reserve in her manner, and also that she thought it not unbecoming to keep herself a little in the background. And we must also remember that when Mme. Necker gave a ball at the Hôtel Leblanc she did not send invitations either to the Duchesse d'Enville or to her daughter, the Duchesse de Rohan-Chabot[1]; that when the Duchesse d'Enville goodnaturedly spoke to Mme. Necker of her forgetfulness, and asked also at the same time for an invitation for her two nephews, the Duc de Liancourt[2]

[1] Elizabeth Louise de la Rochefoucauld, born in 1740, married in 1757 Antoine Auguste, at first Duc de Chabot, then Duc de Rohan, chevalier of the king's orders, lieutenant-general of his armies.

[2] François Armand Frédéric, at first Duc de Liancourt, then Duc de la Rochefoucauld, born in 1747, was before the Revolution lieutenant-general of the king's armies. After having been a member of the Constituent Assembly he emigrated in 1792. He became afterwards a member of the Institut, and took an active part in philanthropical questions. He died in Paris in 1827. His mother, the Duchesse d'Estissac, was sister of the Duchesse d'Enville.

and the Comte de Duretal,[1] Mme. Necker, apparently delighted to be able to please her friend, alleged as an excuse that she feared the young Duchess and her cousins would bore themselves in a company where they would meet so few people with whom they were acquainted.

Reasons very different from these might be urged to show why Mme. Necker need not have expected that Mme. de Vermenoux, her first protectress, should have assisted her in extending her circle of friends. Though the fear of coming down from her aristocratical position, which she imagined she had obtained through her marriage with her late husband, was one of the reasons which determined Germaine Larrivée, dame de Vermenoux, to refuse the offer made to her by M. Necker, still as she had neither friends nor relations in Paris, the place she occupied in society was insignificant enough. And also, owing to mishap in her money affairs, she was obliged to retire to a small country house situated close to the bridge that crosses the Seine at Sèvres. She there received few visits except from Mme. Necker and from Marmontel, who

[1] Armand Alexandre Roger de la Rochefoucauld, Comte de Duretal, brother of the Duc de Liancourt, born in 1748, died at the end of the last century. His wife, who was a la Rochefoucauld of the branch of Surgères, and sister of the first Duc de Doudeauville, was, it is said, the first woman guillotined under the Revolution.

in his *Mémoires* speaks of her with much enthusiasm. He says :—

> At first sight Mme. de Vermenoux seems to have the aspect of Minerva ; but upon her imposing features there would soon appear an air of kindness, of sweetness, of serenity, that charming and modest gaiety which makes her cleverness the more plainly seen and her wisdom all the more attractive. What a pleasure it was to this woman, who lived a reserved and solitary life, to welcome us in her country-house at Sèvres ! What pleasure she took in all the delights of friendship, and how she revelled in the thought of the little suppers we should all have together in Paris ! When she was still young enough to enjoy all the pleasures of life, death took her from us ; but even when I was regretting her loss I felt that a long existence upon this earth would only have filled her last years with pain and bitterness. Had she lived later she would have lived too long.

In her solitary life and with her somewhat straitened means, Mme. de Vermenoux must have more than once sighed for that other and more opulent existence that had been once offered to her by M. Necker. It was doubtless to dissimulate from herself regrets that she would sometimes repeat, in an affected tone, that it was she who had brought about the marriage between Suzanne Curchod and her ancient admirer. Her affectation was not pleasing to Mme. Necker, for in writing to Moultou about Mme. de Vermenoux, Mme. Necker says: "I wish that she would not attribute our marriage to her own doing. I am rather offended with her; and my husband, who

says that I am the only woman he was ever fond of, is annoyed at her speeches." These slight clouds did not prevent, whatever may have been said to the contrary, these two women from keeping up a friendly and affectionate intercourse. Their friendship may be attested by the great number of letters that passed between them; and from these I will select the following, which may, perhaps, be read with interest. The name of Rousseau is mentioned, and so is that of the infant child, who afterwards became Mme. de Staël.

13th August, 1770.

You cannot imagine, dear creature, the great pleasure that your charming letter gave me; it made me recall to mind, for a short while, all the happiness I felt when at Saint Ouen. I am delighted to hear that the stomach of my friend Necker is regaining strength.[1] He had no other ailment; and his mental power will soon become as strong as before, but I beg of him, and I conjure him, to drink the waters more consecutively and with greater constancy than he has done hitherto. I congratulate him at the same time for having found at Spa great noblemen who repay him for the loss of his squire, and for having found actors who can satisfy his natural delicacy of taste. As regards you, dear creature, who are less difficult in your pleasures, I pity you that you are so surrounded with highnesses and masqueradings. But among all these masks cannot you discover a few human faces? Is it possible that there should be one who does not wish to show himself to you?

How am I to thank you, my dear creature, for all the anecdotes that you have been good enough to collect for me!

[1] M. and Mme. Necker were then drinking the waters at Spa.

Your kind heart gives as much value to your smallest services as your understanding assists you in making them appear graceful. How can I give you back all the pleasure that you give to me? But when I am with you, my dear one, my mind is so full of listening to you that I cannot think of anything else, and I am too happy to feel the want of wishing for other enjoyment. Nothing can ever exceed the feelings of sympathy with which you inspire all your friends; and there is no sort of novelty which can amuse us when you are absent from us. Jean Jacques continues to caress his new acquaintances and to quarrel with his old ones. To gain his graces you must let him win a game of chess. It is a game of which he is passionately fond. You see, dear one, that this small passion will find a home in the heads of our philosophers as well as in those of our latter-day heroines. Lemière[1] has given us his *Veuve du Malabar;* but this widow, who fears to burn herself and whose sermons bore every one, was not successful. I am sorry, because that from all this apparatus of wooden piles there should not be found the wherewithal to provide the author with a fire for next winter.

That which has given me more pleasure than anything else in the world was the happiness of seeing your charming child at Madrid. She did all the honours of my Friday, and was the object of universal admiration. Her old husband, La Guerche, displayed all his mincing manners, and the abbé Quesnel, who was quite enchanted, drew his horoscope after his own fashion. What a charming child she is, and what a source of happiness she must be to you! My heart must share your happiness with you to prevent me from being envious. Adieu, dear, dear creature. M. Meister is infinitely flattered because you recollected him; he lays his respects and his homage at your feet.

[1] Antoine Marie Lemière, born in Paris in 1723, died in 1793, was the author of a great number of tragedies now quite forgotten. It is to him that we owe the well-known verse:

"Même quand l'oiseau marche, on sent qu'il a des ailes."

You know doubtless what every one, both at court and in the town, is now talking about. It is the affair of Mme. de Monaco.[1] M. Loiseau[2] will draw up the indictment, and Gerbier[3] will plead for her.

Mme. de Vermenoux would have been extremely unwise had she long borne enmity towards M. Necker because of his seeming infidelity to her, and all the more so because she herself was not very constant in her regrets. Upon Moultou's recommendation she had chosen as tutor for her son the Meister whose name we see mentioned at the end of the above letter. Jacob Meister, a man of Zurich origin, was Grimm's colleague and fellow-worker in certain portions of his *Correspondance Littéraire.* After having been admitted to Mme. de Vermenoux's table he became her friend, and then, if all the truth be told, he was admitted into even greater intimacy. When she died, as yet a young woman, fully believing that Meister would be always faithful to her memory, she bequeathed to him her

[1] The Princesse de Monaco was then trying to get a divorce from her husband.

[2] Alexandre Jérome Loiseau (often called Loiseau de Mauléon, because he came from the little town of Mauléon) was born in 1728, and died in 1771. His name is chiefly celebrated for his having laboured together with Voltaire to obtain a reversal of the judgment passed upon the Calas family. After his death Mme. Necker wrote an eulogium upon him which will be found in her *Mélanges.*

[3] Pierre Jean Baptiste Gerbier, born at Rennes in 1725, died in Paris in 1788, was one of the most celebrated advocates of the eighteenth century. He was nicknamed "the Eagle of the Bar."

heart, making him at the same time swear that he would desire, by his last will and testament, that her heart should be buried with him in his grave. But Meister also was then young. He returned to Zurich, and there married a lady whom he had known when they were both children together. He became a father, and, in his turn, a grandfather, and at last died at the age of eighty, saying: "If I had married earlier, the treasure of my heart would be still more rich with pure delights, and my conscience would be free from bitter memories." The remorse that Meister felt did not, however, make him forget his promise, and in his will were found these words: "I desire that Mme. de Vermenoux's heart may be buried with me in my grave." Desirous of performing his last directions, Meister's heirs made it a point of their duty that his will should be obeyed. But no one knew even the name of Mme. de Vermenoux, still less where was her heart. At last an old servant who was consulted on the matter recollected having seen his master carry carefully about with him a small tin box, and this box had been taken up into the garret in the last house where Meister had lodged. A tin box was there found amidst a quantity of old furniture, and in it there was a woman's heart; and this poor forgotten heart, together with Meister's remains, now lies buried in Zurich cemetery.

As Mme. Necker was not, like most young women, restricted in the choice of her friends, she naturally enough endeavoured to form an acquaintance with those ladies into whose society the access was not difficult, and yet whose reputation for wit and a gentleness of manner was well established. There were three women who, in very different ways, then exercised a sort of supremacy in society, and they may even now be seen with perfect plainness amid all the divergencies of colour of the people of the eighteenth century. Among the townsfolk and the literary world, we see Mme. Geoffrin; among the courtiers and the highest ranks of society, we find la Maréchale de Luxembourg; and half-way between the two, drawing people around her by her own cleverness or charming manner, Mme. du Deffand collected together in her modest apartment in the convent of Saint Joseph the more distinguished of the guests who were welcomed into the two other societies. Mme. Necker made the acquaintance of these three powers consecutively one after the other; and Mme. Geoffrin was the first who extended to her the hand of friendship.

But there was between these two women little similarity of nature; Mme. Geoffrin was as cautious as prudent, and showed as much wariness in her undertakings as Mme. Necker was eager, impetuous, and

intent upon going in a straight line to the object which she had in hand. Mme. Geoffrin would never have committed one of those errors of indiscretion into which Mme. Necker might be drawn by the warmth of her feelings; and, on the other hand, Mme. Necker could never have understood those prudent calculations which made Mme. Geoffrin fear to have compromising friends, and assuredly she was not the woman to have insinuated to Marmontel (who was censured by the Sorbonne) that he had better seek a lodging elsewhere than in her house. But there were, nevertheless, certain resemblances in their situations which seemed to bring them near one to the other. Neither woman was of noble family; they both had a warm and intelligent appreciation of intellectual enjoyments, and they each tried to form for themselves a society composed chiefly of men of letters. Had nature given to Mme. Geoffrin a less complying temper, these resemblances would cercertainly, sooner or later, have given rise to rivalry. Marie Thérèse Rodet[1] was willing that all the world should know who she was. She became the wife of one of the founders of the manufacture of ice, a man whose favourite amusement consisted in blowing the horn, and who after he had read for the third time the same volume of the same book used to say: "Yes, very

[1] Mme. Geoffrin was born in Paris in 1699; she died in 1777.

good; but I think this author repeats himself." Mme. Geoffrin soon lost the bloom of youth, and she possessed none of the other attractions of beauty except the charm of her white hairs. Yet, in spite of these difficulties she succeeded in establishing her *salon*, into which there was not a man of letters who was not proud of being admitted, not a foreigner who did not solicit the honour of being invited, not a nobleman who was not pleased to go as into a house in which he was intimate. After a few years she saw another woman, a foreigner, younger, handsomer, and richer than herself, open her *salon* also, and without much effort gather round her, in two or three years, that same sort of society which with her had been the labour of five-and-twenty years. Bitter quarrels and internecine jealousies have existed between women, based upon a much less serious foundation.

Let it at once be said, to Mme. Geoffrin's honour, that, as regards Mme. Necker, no shadow of a mean thought appears to have ever crossed her mind. I will presently show some of her letters, and they give every indication of a warm and sincere attachment. Mme. Geoffrin, as we know, was not fond of letter-writing. She wrote rarely except to her adopted son, Stanislas Poniatowski,[1] the King of Poland, for she was

[1] Stanislas II. Poniatowski, the last King of Poland, born in 1732, died in 1797, at Grodno, where he lived upon the pension allowed to

not at ease when a pen was in her hand. Her handwriting is extremely crude, and her wild irregularities fully justify the refusal which she gave to a certain abbé who wished to dedicate to her a book upon grammar: "You want to dedicate a grammar to me! to me who cannot even spell properly!" Her letters are not very long, and they are always written in a pleasant tone. We shall see that Mme. Geoffrin was at first somewhat on her guard against the enthusiasm which Mme. Necker wished to pour down upon her:—

My dear and kind friend, I will put my heart into proper order, and this will give me the right to take charge also of yours.

I did not wish to reply to your affectionate letter quite immediately, so that the sentiments that it aroused in me might have time to get cool. I also have had my fits of enthusiasm. I have both seen and felt the inconvenience of them; that is why I do not wish to admit them now. I could tell you enough to make a big volume.

I will come and kiss you as soon as I am able to do so.

If those poor people whom I refused know you, your money would not help them after their late loss.

Wednesday Morning.

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him by the powers who had between them partitioned Poland. During his visit to Paris, when he was a young man, he was under obligations to Mme. Geoffrin, who paid his debts for him, and in return he vowed to her an attachment which he maintained when he was upon the throne. Mme. Geoffrin's letters to Stanislas Poniatowski have lately been published in Paris. They form only one volume.

The feeling of that which was reasonable, everything having its proper time and place, was the most characteristic feature in the mind of Mme. Geoffrin. This idea never left her, even in the most personal matters; she must therefore sometimes have found it difficult to accommodate herself to the exuberance of feeling which showed itself easily enough in Mme. Necker—a woman always true to herself and to the thoughts as they formed themselves within her breast. After a few years, when they had become intimate one with the other, the elder lady thus mildly reproves the younger one:—

Assuredly I shall always be pleased with my good friends when they are in good health. And the hope of the re-establishment of that of my kind friend is news very grateful to me. I thank my dear creature with all my heart for having told me so. But as I am bound to complain without having cause for complaint, being led on by the force of circumstances, I will fulfil my vocation by telling her that she is incorrigible. She is always infatuated; she is never cool and reserved.

Do you know, my pretty one, that your exaggerated praises confound me instead of pleasing me and flattering me. I am always afraid that your giddiness will evaporate. You will then judge me to be so different from your hitherto preconceived opinion that you will punish me for your own mistake, and allow me no merit at all.

I have my virtues and my good qualities, but I have also many faults. Of these I am perfectly well aware, and every day I endeavour to correct them.

My dear friend, I beg of you to lessen your excessive

admiration. I assure you that you humiliate me; and that is certainly not your intention.

The angels think very little about me, and I do not trouble myself about them. Their praise or their blame is indifferent to me, for I shall not come in their way; but what I do desire is that you should love me and that you should take me as you find me.

You do not tell me anything about your return.

When in order to see Stanislas Poniatowski Mme. Geoffrin undertook that celebrated journey into Poland which caused her reputation to be the more widely known, and during which journey she received as many marks of homage as would have been offered to a princess, she received a letter from Mme. Necker which much touched her, because of the sentiments of affectionate solicitude it contained, and she immediately answered as follows:—

WARSAW, *15th August*, 1766.

Your little note, my pretty one, was so full of tender things, that after reading it I feel as if I had been embalmed.

My heart is filled with delight because of this agreeable perfume.

You are to me a most charming housewife; it is not very long since I first knew you, and I consider you now as one of my oldest friends.

I see that you were uneasy as to my journey; I was much touched with your kind thoughts about me, and I shall be grateful for it all my life. The way in which I bore the fatigue in coming here may reassure my friends as to my safe return.

I can assure you that people will think me charming. The constant worship that I pay to friendship, and the friendship

also which I receive, confirms me in the value of this precious sentiment. It is very necessary for enjoyment in life.

I shall esteem very highly all those who have been actuated with this thought.

Be sure, therefore, happy spouse, of the pleasure that I shall have in seeing you again.

When she returned from Poland Mme. Geoffrin endeavoured by various acts of kindness to increase her friendship with the Neckers. And consequently there was a frequent exchange of short but affectionately written letters. One day Mme. Geoffrin sends word to Mme. Necker that she will come to eat her soup by her bedside, and insists that there be no other company but that of the charming housewife. Another day she asks leave to send to Mme. Necker's house, as she does to that of her most intimate friends, a chair which she finds to be suitable to herself; and then, in speaking of M. Necker, she adds:—

My well-beloved having the same tastes as myself, would of course wish always to have my chair, and he would beat me, as his little daughter does, to make me give it up to him. In order that there may be peace between us, here is a chair for him also. They are both made to be of a convenient height, and because of their lightness they are easily carried. Their construction is of the simplest kind. They were bought at the sale of Philemon and Baucis.

Might not a picture be drawn—one of those anecdotical pictures now so much in vogue—of the young

child, afterwards Mme. de Staël, beating old Mme. Geoffrin to give up to her the possession of her chair? But this is not the only time that Mme. Necker's daughter was mentioned by Mme. Geoffrin. Sometimes the elderly lady sends her greetings to Cinderella; sometimes she announces, always in a severe tone, that if she comes in that evening she will give "the whip to the mother, and a bonbon to the little one." I will now close these extracts by quoting a letter, rather longer than the others, in which Mme. Geoffrin, drawing herself in the same natural colours, and with the same bad spelling, shows two distinctive features peculiar to her nature: her kindly complaining humour which made her work unceasingly for the welfare of her friends; and that touch of vanity which made her take a delight in recalling to mind her journey to Poland, which was to her the great event of her life, her day of triumph and her entry into the Capitol.

PARIS, 11*th July*, 1772.

No one knows better or feels more thoroughly than you, my dear and kindest friend, the sweetness of friendship and its charms, and no one makes their friends recognise them so fully. But you will never know that facility, that ease, and that liberty which gives to society its perfect enjoyment. I had made my stipulations with our dear friend Thomas that he would give me news of your doings, simply in bulletin, as doctors issue bulletins of their patients. In this way one hears about those people in whom one is interested, and one is not obliged to reply.

But how is it possible not to answer the kind and charming letter that I have received from you? But still I only reply to tell you that it made me a little angry. I see that it is impossible to change anything in your uneasy, restless, and, at the same time, weak character. When I was in Poland I was then sixty-six years old, and I never went out of my seat. I made then a longer journey than that which you are now making. I travelled in places where there were no roads, and where there was no lodging other than in the stable. The cattle were driven out and we paid our way by giving money, some uneatable bread, and detestable water. But I had an object before me, and that object made me every day forget the day which had passed. I thought only of the evil of the moment, and even then that was not intolerable.

Your object is your health. That ought to be sufficient to make you able to bear a few days' inconvenience, after which you will be again restored; for without health there can be no happiness.

But it is impossible to strengthen your weak character, and to calm your restlessness. I must give up all hope of correcting you, and must make you undergo a penitence as one punishes children to make them learn their lessons. I therefore declare to you that if you write to me again, not only will I not answer you, but I will not even read your letter, and my sulkiness will last until long after you have come back.

After having praised me beyond all reason, after having said to me the kindest and the most affectionate things in all the world, so that you may better express your friendship for me, you tell me not to answer you.

Is that possible for me?

I appeal to M. Necker and to M. Thomas.

My dear friends, you are both reasonable beings, but you must agree that she is unreasonable.

And if you let her write while she is drinking the waters, they will get into her head.

Adieu, my dear friends, it is you two that I embrace; as for this fine lady, I say nothing to her, nor have I anything to do with her.

To go from Mme. Geoffrin's *salon* into that of the Maréchale de Luxembourg is as though we were nowadays to go from an *entresol* in the Marais into one of the old hôtels in the Faubourg Saint Germain. The undoubted supremacy which the Maréchale de Luxembourg exercised over the best company in Paris during the fifteen or twenty years before the French Revolution is one of those characteristics which paint a given epoch and the people who were then living. How she had passed her youth in the last years of the reign of Louis XIV., still bearing the name of Boufflers[1]—a name which the courage and the virtues of the old marshal had made so glorious—we know from the celebrated couplet of M. de Tressan:—

> Quand Boufflers parut à la cour,
> De l'Amour on crut voir la mère;
> Chacun s'empressait à lui plaire,
> Et chacun . . . .

[1] Madeleine Angélique de Neufville Villeroy, granddaughter of the Marshal, was born in 1707, and in 1721 she married the Duc de Boufflers. She became a widow in 1747, and in 1750 she married Charles Frédéric de Montmorency, Maréchal and Duc de Luxembourg, who was born in 1702, and died in 1764. She died in 1787. J. J. Rousseau, in his *Confessions*, speaks at length about the Maréchal and the Maréchale de Luxembourg.

I will not finish the last line, the offensiveness of which fully deserved the slap on the face that the lady gave to M. de Tressan himself one day when he fell into the trap that she had laid for him, and declared himself to be the author of the verse. But if M. de Tressan deserved the slap on the face, we must allow also that the lady deserved the squib. The memoirs of the time, and especially those of Besenval,[1] are full of anecdotes concerning her; and even though we suppose that the tell-tale colonel did invent some of these stories—for stories are always being invented of rich people—there would still remain a very considerable number to explain, if any explanation be necessary, for the old lady was always surrounded by people willing to pay her homage, why he wrote these lines which will be everlastingly true: "In France if any one is wealthy and bears a good family name, not only is everything forgotten, but one may even enjoy an honoured old age after having spent one's youth in utter shamelessness."

The truth is that when she was between forty and fifty years old, the Maréchale de Luxembourg perceived

[1] Pierre Victor Baron de Besenval, born at Soleure in 1772, died in Paris in 1794. He was a lieutenant-colonel in the Swiss Guards, of which regiment the Comte d'Artois was the colonel in command, and he enjoyed for a short time the favour of Marie Antoinette. He left two volumes of *Mémoires*, which were published in 1805, and which give many curious details as to the Court life under Louis XVI.

that gallantry in a woman of that age was looked upon as an object of ridicule, and that she then thought fit to change her mode of life. She did not become a devotee, for conversions of this sort were no longer the mode in the eighteenth century. She did not set herself up as a wit, for she had natural cleverness and wit enough of her own, and it was not necessary for her in this respect to try to imitate any one; but she did lead a life of respectability. In her hôtel in Paris, as well as in her country house at Montmorency (which was not the feudal castle belonging to the ancient barons[1]), she had no trouble in collecting around her people of the best company who came to her to learn their lessons in elegant manners and good behaviour. It was there that young men and young women made their first entries into the world, and there also that the abbé Périgord (the future Prince de Talleyrand) for the first time drew people's attention to him by one of those happy answers which in later years seemed to be always ready upon his tongue. Her knowledge of the ways of the world, her penetration into people's

[1] The patrimonial domain of the Montmorencys had passed into the hands of the Condés. Rousseau says, in his *Confessions*, that the Maréchal and the Maréchale de Luxembourg occupied "at Enghien, or at Montmorency, a private house, built by Croisat 'the poor' (he was, no doubt, one of the two brothers Crozat), which, because it had the magnificence of the finest castles, deserves and bears the appellation."

characters, her mind ever quick to notice the follies of others, and also her power of exposing them, often gave to her smallest judgments all the weight of a judicial decision. A man who knew very well the ways of the world, the Duc de Lévis,[1] wrote of her :—

> No Roman censor had ever been more useful to the manners of the Republic than was the Maréchale de Luxembourg to the welfare of society during the last year which preceded the Revolution. With the help of a great name, of much audacity, and above all because she was a woman of high birth, she was enabled to live down a reputation for conduct that had been more than that of mere thoughtlessness, and to establish her own authority as paramount in matters of etiquette and good breeding, and in those customs upon which the foundation of politeness is composed. Her authority over the young people of both sexes was absolute. She controlled the giddiness of the young women, and would not allow them to be particular in their coquetry; she obliged the young men to observe a quietness of manner, and gentleness of demeanour : in a word, she maintained the old spirit of French urbanity. In her house were preserved unimpaired the noble and easy manners which all Europe came to Paris to admire, but which every one endeavoured in vain to imitate.

Since all Europe had admired in the *salon* of the Maréchale de Luxembourg the noble and easy manner which she herself had always preserved, it would have

[1] Pierre Marc Gaston, Duc de Lévis, born in 1765, died in 1830, was made under the Restoration lieutenant-general, and also a peer of France. He is the author of a little collection of *Pensées et Maximes*, which appeared in 1808, and of a volume of *Souvenirs et Portraits*. He was a member of the French Academy.

been difficult for Mme. Necker not to have solicited the honour of being presented in her drawing-room, and not to have paid to her the commonplace homage which every young woman owes to older ladies who have lived before them, and have taken their part in what was going on in the world. And the acquaintanceship was the more strongly enforced upon Mme. Necker because of the proximity of the country houses of both ladies. Saint Ouen was but two leagues from Montmorency, and as in the eighteenth century people who lived in the neighbourhood of Paris used to make frequent visits to each other's houses, it was almost impossible but that in this case such friendly civilities should not be often exchanged. But I do not find any evidence of the Maréchale having been to Mme. Necker's Friday evening parties, nor to those meetings of more intimate friends on the Tuesday. The great lady, though she was very slightly acquainted with the Choiseul family, went to spend a week at Chanteloup at the time when they were in disfavour—for it was rather the mode in those days to place oneself upon the side of the Opposition;—but in all probability she would not have so far departed from her ordinary habits as to go to the Rue de Cléry. It was sufficiently well known that she did not return visits. But, on the other hand, in the summer she would often go to supper

at Saint Ouen. And upon such days Mme. Necker did not invite her literary friends, for, with the exception of Rousseau, the duchess was not partial to that class of persons; the hostess therefore selected rather such people as belonged by their rank to the same class in society as the Maréchale. Among the ladies there were the Comtesse de Boufflers,[1] the Comtesse de Cambise[2] (the celebrated friend of the Prince de Conti), the Princesse d'Hénin, the Comtesse de Broglie, and a little later Mme. du Deffand. The conversation was gay, free, brilliant, perhaps less ambitious and less philosophical than that which took place on the Friday evenings; and then after supper the Maréchale gave orders that her carriage should be got ready for her, and she drove back again to Montmorency.

The intercourse between Saint Ouen and Montmorency would, in all probability, have been less close if

[1] Marie Charlotte Hippolyte de Campet de Saujon, was born in 1725, and in 1746 she married the Comte de Boufflers Rouverel. She was for many years closely intimate with the Prince de Conti, and kept for him a sort of salon in the Temple quarter of Paris, and also at the Isle-Adam. Hence the nickname, *l'Idole du Temple.* She outlived the Revolution, and died, it is believed, in the year 1800. (See Sainte-Beuve's *Nouveaux Lundis*, t. iii.)

[2] The Vicomtesse de Cambise was a niece of the Comtesse de Boufflers. She emigrated to England when the Revolution broke out, and died at Richmond in 1809. We shall again meet with the Princesse d'Hénin later on in this book. The Comtesse de Broglie had been a Montmorency on the Flandre side, and she married that Comte de Broglie who was the chief agent of the Secret du Roi.

Mme. Necker had not found an irresistible charm in the friendship which soon sprang up between herself and Amélie de Boufflers, Duchesse de Lauzun, the grand-daughter of the Maréchale by her first marriage. By what mysterious protection can this pure and beautiful lily have grown upon such unwholesome soil? When she was eleven years old, the Maréchale thought that she was too timid, and as she kissed her she charged Rousseau to sharpen her wits. When the girl was sixteen the old lady made her marry the Duc de Lauzun, who was only nineteen; and who, as he said himself, "was educated by his mother's lacquey, who, in order that he might bear a mark of distinction, was decorated with the title of *valet-de-chambre*." And this duke gave every promise (as though there were names to which some fatality is always attached) of proving himself to be one day equal to the reputation left by the first duke bearing the same title, but from whom he was, in fact, no descendant.[1] Betrayed the day before her marriage by her betrothed, who secretly

[1] The first Duc de Lauzun was Nompar de Caumont. The second, Armand Louis de Gontaut Biron, who was born in 1745, became Duc de Biron in 1788, and afterwards general of the armies of the Republic. He died on the scaffold on the 31st December, 1793. His wife, a daughter of the Duc de Boufflers and of a Montmorency on the side of Flandre, was born in 1750, and died also on the scaffold in 1794.

offered to Mlle. de Beauvau (afterwards the Princesse de Poix) to break off his engagement that he might marry her; abandoned the day after her marriage by a husband who, from self-willed contradiction, had taken a violent dislike to her; married and widowed, so to speak, both at the same time, without other assistance, without other example than that given to her by the Maréchale, her grandmother;—the Duchesse de Lauzun nevertheless remained throughout all her life a timid little bird, as Mme. du Deffand used to call her, and she kept until the day she mounted the scaffold that air of sweetness and virgin modesty which had so charmed and fascinated Rousseau. As the Vicomtesse de Noailles said of her, "she had the weakness to love her husband, but the dignity to hide it from everybody;" and, like Mme. de Bonneval[1] (also a Biron by blood), she offers to the imagination the most lovely model of those exquisite and noble women who, united to a creature who is unworthy of them, become impassioned in that which they conceive to be their duty; they become romantic in their constancy, and if it were demanded of them they would be ready to lay down their lives at the feet of their idol.

[1] Judith de Biron was one of the twenty-six children of the Duc de Biron; in 1717 she married her cousin, the Comte Charles Alexandre de Bonneval, who was known under the name of Bonneval Pacha. She died in 1741.

Mme. Necker felt herself drawn towards the Duchesse de Lauzun by a sentiment which Mme. Geoffrin might perhaps have denounced as infatuation, but which was certainly fully justified. Probably for the first time since she had left her native country, she had contracted a close friendship with a lady whose pure and loving soul showed everywhere its true and noble purpose, and which, in a woman, whatever may be said to the contrary, will always remain the highest and best of all qualities. When Mme. Necker wished to give an idea of the perfections of her friend she used to say, "the imaginary portraits are the only ones that are like her." She one day tried to describe her, and though this portrait has already been made public, my readers will forgive me for recalling the principal features, and for delaying them a few moments in such good company.

PORTRAIT OF EMILY.

Happy are those women who, by their simplicity and by their modesty, have been able for a long time to conceal their merits, and who have taught their secret to others before they knew it themselves! Happy are those who have made themselves beloved before they have created envy, and who, from an early age, have known that the example given silently is the most useful!

The high respect in which Emily is held is not owing to virtue only, for there are women who are very good, who are exact

in the performance of their duty, but they have not obtained that flower of reputation that has been given to Emily. It is, therefore, to an inner purity; it is to the character of her thoughts, which shows itself in all that she says, in all her motions, of which her face is the picture, that she owes the esteem and the high regard in which she is everywhere held. This sweet and tender soul, who goes out into the world and lives like other people, seems to transform into virtuous actions all matters of small importance. She is vexed if she forgets the least detail; she blushes if one looks at her, and she blushes even if she perceives that she has been noticed. Emily knows very exactly the importance of small matters in the fulfilment of her duties, and she does not neglect to do anything that may contribute to the happiness of others or increase their affection for herself. It is by a network of very delicate perceptions recognised, or rather guessed, by sensitive people, and which is more easy for them to exercise for themselves than to describe; it is by a never failing constancy that Emily has made for herself a way to happiness in face of the most difficult and the most cruel circumstances. Who can have known this charming woman without feeling also the sweetest emotions of friendship and of love! Her simple graces might create too impassioned thoughts, if these were not checked by the noble modesty of her looks and by the celestial expression of her face. It is in this way that Emily makes her presence felt, though she is unconscious of the fact, and that she has never given rise to thoughts that were unworthy of her.

It may, however, be more advisable to show some of the letters written by the Duchesse de Lauzun, and so to let her speak for herself. The following is addressed to M. Necker, who had sent to the elder duchess his book upon the administration of finance. In this letter we shall see her as Mme. Necker described her:

pleasing, joyful, modest, astonished that any one should think about her, and that her judgment should be considered as valuable :—

6th January, 1785.

I cannot express to you, sir, how sensible I am of the flattering mark of your recollection of me. I am very glad that the letter which I had the honour of writing to Mme. Necker should have crossed yours, and that it should have proved to you that my admiration was so great that it could not be further increased by my gratitude. You will have seen also that my gratitude was not less strong, though I did not suppose that I was one of those whom you were good enough to mention ; but in reading such an admirable work it is impossible that a sentiment of self-love or of personal feeling should join itself to those which it creates. After reading one feels oneself to be a better creature than before, and one is transported at seeing so much love shown for the public welfare, at learning that there are so many means to satisfy this passion, and at finding such an uncommon disinterestedness accompanied with such extraordinary courage and high diversities of mind. Though I am ignorant, sir, and am simple-minded, if I dared to express an opinion upon and to praise several parts of your work which treat of subjects beyond my knowledge, I am at any rate able, as are all those who have not been armed against you by cupidity and self-interest, to recognise in it the value of all that is good. If I may thus express myself, you will not blame me because I have given a higher place to virtue than to talent.

I am infinitely obliged to you for having given me news of Mme. Necker. I am sorry to hear that she is always weak and poorly ; but I am nevertheless very pleased to know that her doctor assures you that there is no cause for danger. Pray tell her of my affection for her, and that I am sincerely grateful that she should have been so kind as to take so much interest in me. But I am ashamed to think that because of her obliging care as

to the punctuality of the person who undertook your commission, she should have deprived you of the copy that you still possessed.

I told my friends all that you wished me to say to them. They were much pleased and much flattered, as indeed they ought to have been. I had already spoken to Mme. Necker of Mme. de Poix and of Mme. de Bouillon,[1] but I said nothing about Mme. d'Hénin, who had lately lost her mother, and was therefore unable to think of anything else. She did not read your introduction until after the other ladies had read it. She was enchanted, and scolded me because I did not tell her of it before, and also because I did not tell you her opinion sooner. She imagines that by some special right you should receive her praises, and that she should be always remembered to you. I do not know, sir, if you understand what I mean; but perhaps you are already aware that an anonymous letter has been written, pretending to be a letter from you, to Mme. de Beauvau, as ill-natured in tone as it is different from your manner of writing, and in which Mme. d'Hénin is spoken of in very harsh terms. The writer has done me the honour to mention my name, and I am greatly flattered in that he has spoken of my attachment for you. He says that *I could not be of any use to you, that I do not know how to speak in public, except at the Tuileries, and the present is not the proper season for going there.*[2] You will see that there is not much anger shown in this sentence; and those who do not know me may think that I am at times rather light-headed; but I may console myself in thinking that until such an event happens I have not attracted public attention towards me, and

[1] The Duchesse de Bouillon was sister-in-law of the first wife of the Maréchal de Beauvau, father of the Princesse de Poix.

[2] The Duchesse de Lauzun here alludes to the well known anecdote of her altercation with a detractor of M. Necker's in the Tuileries Gardens. The anecdote is often made to date from the early days of the Revolution; but the date of this letter shows that it was anterior to the Revolution.

that the occasion to get oneself talked about would not be badly chosen.

Adieu, monsieur; allow me to thank you again a thousand times, and to assure you of the sentiments with which I have the honour to be your very humble and very obedient servant,

BOUFFLERS D. DE LAUZUN.

Mamma sends a thousand kind wishes to Mme. Necker. We are both very unhappy at being so long separated from her and from you.

The following letter was written about the same time from the Duchesse de Lauzun to Mme. Necker, who was then staying upon the banks of the Lake of Geneva:—

16th August.

The fear, madam, of being importunate alone prevented Mme. de Luxembourg and myself from begging you to give us news of your own self; but our deep interest in you, madam, allows us to neglect no occasion of learning how you are, for we have heard with much concern that you were dissatisfied with the condition of your health. Although your letter does not enter into details on this matter, it still allows us to hope that you are somewhat improved; but this mark of your kindness towards us would have been still more pleasing if you had been good enough to say a little more about yourself. And I assure you, madam, that we have some right to say this because of our admiration for you, and the affectionate sentiments which you have created in us.

Nothing can be more charming than your descriptions of the country in which you are now staying. I am truly glad to know that you are in such an agreeable resting-place. But this pleasant thought is marred by some uneasiness, and a feeling of egotism which makes me fear that in future you will find Paris to be

unbearable as a place of residence, and that we shall no longer have the happiness of seeing you ; but this thought is too painful, and I cannot bear to dwell upon it.

I imagine that it must be very difficult not to think of Julia when one lives in the same place where Rousseau has drawn such charming pictures. But still this novel is far from being the one which I have read with the greatest pleasure. *Clarissa* and *Cecilia* have charmed me much more. A love which we endeavour to conceal is much more interesting than that which is painted in very strong colours ; and it seems too that one believes more fully in the love which has made itself felt, and that the imagination goes further than any expressions. If I were in Switzerland I should try to find out, in the Canton of Berne, the habitation of M. Delaroche,[1] a minister whose history I read in *The Mirror* with very great delight. I do not know, madam, if you have this book, but if you had been here I would have taken the liberty of sending it to you, and also that of asking you to read it. When I have any enjoyment of this kind it is impossible for me not to think of you; and whenever I meet with noble, kind, and delicate sentiments, the thought of you comes instantly before my mind.

Adieu, madam; I am abusing your great indulgence in writing to you such a long letter, and am so little worthy of taking up so much of your time. I do not know how to thank you for the good opinion you have formed of me; if I cannot justify it, I have at least the merit of recognising its value, and of being fondly attached to you for the remainder of my life. Allow me to embrace Mlle. Necker, and to thank M. Necker for his remembrance of me. I am all the more sensible of this because admiration and sympathy are qualities which he inspires in too many people to give me a particular right not to be forgotten.

[1] The Duchesse de Lauzun has probably been here led into error. She intended to speak of Oberlin, the celebrated pasteur of Ban de la Roche. But Ban de la Roche is situated in the Vosges.

When we read these letters, and when we think that in less than ten years this woman, so sensitive and so refined, was put to death by the public executioner, it is impossible not to feel some of that emotion that would arise in us if we saw a young and handsome creature on whose features a hopeless doom had already imprinted the melancholy charm and the mournful grace of death.

CHAPTER IX.

LA MARQUISE DU DEFFAND—LA MARQUISE DE LA FERTÉ IMBAULT—MADAME DE MARCHAIS.

MME. NECKER had long known the Maréchale de Luxembourg when she made the acquaintance of Mme. du Deffand.[1] When this acquaintanceship began, the recollection of those fêtes given by the Regent, at which Mme. du Deffand had shone most brilliantly, in company with Mme. D'Averne, who was the then mistress of the day, had long since passed and gone. The President Hénault[2] was dying or was dead. Nothing

[1] Marie de Vichy Chamrond, Marquise du Deffand, was born in 1697, and died in 1780, in the Convent of Saint Joseph. As has been already said, this convent stood upon the site where is now built the present Ministère de la Guerre.

[2] Charles Jean François Hénault, born in Paris in 1685, died in 1770, President of the Chambre des Enquêtes to the Parliament of Paris, is perhaps better known to us now because of his long close connection with Mme. du Deffand than because of the chronological abridgment of the events of his life for which he had composed the verse:

"Indocti discant et ament meminisse periti."

could be more respectable than the sort of life led by the blind old Marchioness in the convent of Saint Joseph; and the small company of friends who used to meet there had too good a reputation for elegance and for wit not to make Mme. Necker wish to be admitted into the circle. The communications that had passed between Voltaire and Mme. du Deffand had prompted in her this desire. We know that Mme. Necker kept up a correspondence with Voltaire which would not have been the least among the treasures in the archives at Coppet if the letters of Voltaire to Mme. Necker had not been already published. This correspondence first began at a time when, as a young girl partly emancipated from and more indocile to the precepts of Calvin than the majority of her compatriots, Suzanne Curchod used to witness the dramatic representations at Ferney. To exchange letters with Voltaire was an honour much envied by the ladies of fashion, as also was that of receiving his short poems in manuscript. And Mme. Necker sometimes complained to Voltaire that he had forgotten her, and that Mme. du Deffand had been honoured with his gifts. She wrote to him:—

You have made me feel, sir, all the torments of jealousy; and I wanted fresh proofs of your kindness to prevent me from being altogether unhappy. When Mme. du Deffand receives any one of your works she is very proud of it, and she will not give it

away; for she wishes, as far as she can, to keep from us that light which she no longer possesses.

In spite of her small grievances, Mme. Necker wishes, perhaps to please Voltaire, to make the acquaintance of her rival, and when that presentation had been accomplished she wrote to Ferney:—

I have made the acquaintance of Mme. du Deffand. It was your letters and your opinion of her that excited my curiosity. Mme. du Deffand is still very brilliant. She makes amends for what she has lost in intellect by her great animation. She is happy, she is gay, for she sees things only through your eyes.

We know according to what standard we must value Mme. du Deffand's gaiety of heart, because we have the letters in which this unsated woman poured forth all the ardour and all the bitterness of her last passion. And this judgment upon her character would do little credit to Mme. Necker's sagacity if we expected to find in it anything more than a compliment paid to Voltaire. Mme. Necker also wrote to Voltaire about some verses which he had sent to Mme. du Deffand, and in which he had humorously made her an offer of marriage:—

The stanzas which you sent to your shepherdess have in them all the flowers of spring; you are singing the misfortunes of old age while you have yet the voice of a nightingale. But if you ask for my advice I must tell you that your marriage with Mme. du Deffand does not appear suitable. She is blind, and

we all know that Apollo is the god of light. Nevertheless, the lady accepts the proposition with much joy. I beg that you will not take her decision too literally. You ought to be alone in the world, without any connections, for you are faultless as you are original, and wholly different from everybody. The mere name of Mme. Voltaire would be a satire, unless indeed you had married Minerva, and even then she would be accused of over-presumption.

Let us now see how Mme. du Deffand, on her side, explained to Walpole[1] the desire which the Neckers had to make her acquaintance :—

I have to go to-morrow evening to a supper, and I would very willingly let some one else go in my place. It is at Saint Ouen, at M. and Mme. Necker's. They wished to know me because they had heard of me as a wit who did not like the wits. Such a person appears to them to be a rarity, and worthy of curiosity. I was silly enough to make their acquaintance, and when I ask myself the reason why, I blush at discovering that it was the shame of boredom, and that I am often as imbecile as Gribouille, who threw himself into the water because he was afraid of the rain.

This never ceasing feeling of boredom,—which the poor Marchioness always carried about with her, not to the seaside, as did Byron and other used-up men of our present century, but into every *salon*, and which she

[1] Horace Walpole, the third son of the minister Robert Walpole, born at Houghton in 1718, died in 1797, was the author of the *Castle of Otranto* and of several other works. His reputation is chiefly owing to his correspondence, which was not published until after his death ; and this reputation, at least in France, has not suffered from the warm affection that was felt for him by Mme. du Deffand.

dreaded to meet even in those places where she went purposely to avoid it,—she thought for a short while that she might escape meeting it in Mme. Necker's drawing-room. The only two letters that I have found from Mme. du Deffand—that is, written by de Wiart, her secretary—among Mme. Necker's papers show a lively appreciation of the household of the latter lady. The first letter is in truth only a simple letter of invitation addressed to M. Necker; but it was kind and warm hearted.

Wednesday, Eight o'clock.

I could not have been more vexed than I was yesterday. I foresaw your excuses, and you were wrong. At half-past nine every one had gone from here but Mme. de Mirepoix,[1] M. and Mme. de Beauvau, and my bishop.[2] We regretted you very much, and I cannot console myself because I had not the honour of seeing Mme. Necker. I will rely upon you tomorrow,

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[1] Anne Marguérite Gabrielle de Craon (sister of the Prince de Beauvau, who is mentioned in this letter, and whom we shall meet again later on) had married, first, Jacques Henri de Lorraine, Prince de Lixin, and afterwards Charles Pierre Gaston de Levis, hereditary marshal of the faith, Marquis and afterwards Duke de Mirepoix, and also Maréchal de France. Montesquieu, who was a great admirer of the Maréchale, had thus described her:

"Sans se montrer, sans se cacher,
Elle se plaît dans la prairie;
Elle y pourrait finir sa vie
Si l'œil ne venait la chercher."

[2] It is difficult enough to say who may be the prelate whom Mme. du Deffand designates here as *her bishop*. One of the bishops that she saw most frequently was her nephew, the Archbishop of Toulouse.

Thursday. If Mme. Necker would come a little early, say between six and seven, she would find nobody. I beg that both she and you will believe that anything that debars me from seeing you is extremely annoying to me.

The second letter, which is more interesting, was written by Mme. du Deffand to Mme. Necker consequent upon a discussion that had taken place between them as to whether our first judgments upon people, when they are true, have been formed by our knowledge of the usages of the world or by our unconscious instincts. Mme. du Deffand naturally argued in favour of the instincts, Mme. Necker in favour of people's knowledge; and their disputes grew so warm that upon the following day Mme. du Deffand thought it expedient to write to Mme. Necker the following letter:—

I have been thinking, madam, upon our late conversation, and I fear that it was not altogether to your taste. The vivacity with which I expressed myself went beyond the bounds of good manners. I flatter myself that you understood that this was owing to the fact that I very seldom take a part in argument; and perhaps also it may have been owing to my want of knowledge. I thought, though I did not perhaps make myself quite clearly understood, that one's first impressions, and one's first judgments, may be true, and that they do not come from the knowledge of the usage of society, but from a quick and ready feeling, for which one would be much puzzled to give an adequate reason.

Old as I am, madam, such is my opinion. I beg that you will not think the less of my friendship, and that your friendship also may be not diminished; and do not judge me too

hardly by what we know of the ways of the world. If my sentiments are like those of a child, they are therefore all the more sincere. I hope also, madam, they will not be less agreeable to you.

Monday, 12th December.

Mme. du Deffand found at first some pleasure in this new society, and she wrote to the Duchesse de Choiseul:—

I little thought that I should ever know Mmes. Necker and de Marchais. I see them often, and like them very well. They are kind women; they are not stupid, nor are they silly; they are better made for society than most of the ladies in the fashionable world. I prefer that which relieves one from boredom to all the airs and graces of the wits.

And in another letter to Walpole she says: "This M. Necker is a very polished man. He is very clever, but he puts too much metaphysics into everything that he writes. . . . In society he is quite natural, and very lively; he is perfectly frank, he talks little, and is often absent minded. I go to supper once a week at his country house at Saint Ouen. His wife is clever and is a woman of good parts. Her society is generally that of men of letters, who, as you know, are not partial to me, and they are not best pleased that she should have chosen me as a friend."

But before very long Mme. du Deffand found her inexorable enemy, boredom, even at Saint Ouen, and

at first she was inclined to be angry with her own self. She wrote to the abbé Barthélemy:[1] "I went to supper the other day at the Neckers; I was just like Lacouture, I did not understand what was being said, and the noise was unbearable." Also in another letter: "I supped the other day with the Neckers; had you been there you would have been ashamed of me. I was downright stupid. It was in nowise M. Necker's fault. He does not set up for being a wit, nor a metaphysician; but he was nearly as stupid as I was." Then by degrees she becomes disenchanted with them as she did with all her friends, and she begins by first attacking the lady: "The Neckers do not surprise me in what they are doing," so she writes to Walpole, when M. and Mme. Necker had gone for a short visit to England. "They did not know for what purpose they were undertaking their journey. They will not be absent long. I thank you for your kindness to them. They are wise people; the husband is a very clever and an upright man, the wife is stiff and cold, full of self-love, but an honest person." Before very long the husband's turn will come. In a moment of enthusiasm she had found certain resemblances between M. Necker and Walpole. The haughty Walpole was doubtless

[1] Jean Jacques Barthélemy, born at Cassis in Provence, in 1716, died in 1795, was the author of the *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis*.

not much flattered with the comparison, and as he probably enough let his displeasure be seen, Mme. du Deffand at once wrote back to him :—

> I see plainly that the Neckers do not please you very much. They are both clever, but the man more especially. I admit that he is wanting in one of those qualities which is most necessary to make people agreeable—that is, a certain quality which gives, so to say, ideas to those with whom one is talking. He does not assist you in developing your thoughts, and you feel more stupid in talking to him than with others, or than when you are quite alone.

Always distrusting herself, and as severe in condemning her own intellect as that of others, Mme. du Deffand more than once thought that she was stupid when she was talking to M. Necker. At first she laid the blame upon herself; at last she was angry with him, and in her heat she was unjust against herself and perhaps against him also.

On her side, too, Mme. Necker, in her intercourse with Mme. du Deffand, appears to have changed from infatuation to feelings of disenchantment. At the outset her expressions were clothed in happy and sympathetic language. Wishing to reply to questions put to her with that same vivacity which, in spite of her sad infirmity, gave such an air of brilliancy to the conversation of the old Marchioness, Mme. Necker used to say: "Mme. du Deffand, is blind, though we do not know

it, and she can hardly be aware of it." In the annotations which she made nearly every day of things that interested her, she was careful to note those sayings, so witty, so true, and sometimes so sharp, which would escape from the mouth of Mme. du Deffand, like the oracles from the gods. But later on, and as if the disfavour into which this lady had fallen had aroused her perspicuity, Mme. Necker took note also of those smart sayings which were pronounced against Mme. du Deffand by people who feared her more than they loved her. She has recorded a phrase—certainly not an obliging one—spoken by the Chevalier d'Aydie:[1] "I do not value Mme. du Deffand very highly, but she is like a big dog who starts a great deal of game;" and this other one also, which if it was actually spoken would do little honour to the courtesy of the graceful lover of Mlle. Aïssé: "Mme. du Deffand said to the Chevalier d'Aydie, 'It seems to me that I am the woman you love most.' 'Do not say that,' he replied, 'people would say I loved nobody!'" The friendship between the two ladies had, in fact, grown cold upon both sides;

[1] The Chevalier Blaise Marie d'Aydie was born in 1690 and died in 1760. He is known principally because of his attachment to the graceful Charlotte Aïssé, a Circassian woman by birth, who, when she was about four years old, had been bought in the market at Constantinople by M. de Ferriol, the French ambassador, and then brought by him to Paris. See what Sainte-Beuve says of Mlle. Aïssé in his *Portraits littéraires*, vol. iii. ed. of 1846.

for when Mme. du Deffand died Mme. Necker wrote to Lord Stormont:—

> This poor woman has left the world just as she had lived in it. She imagined that society always meant company. Her bed was surrounded by so-called friends, but there were few tears shed. Little given to reflection, she was unable to think of the mysteries of the future. And even death, this great event, gave her only a sad and superficial thought. I have noticed plainly enough that the shade is but a light one between actual existence and the end of one insensible to the importance of the value of life.

The poor Marchioness deserved to have a better judgment passed upon her. She was not insensible, but withered up; and Mme. Necker would not have spoken of her so harshly if she had first seen the letter in which Mme. du Deffand, as she was dying, sent her farewell message to Walpole. At the end of that letter she says: "Enjoy yourself, my friend, as much as you can; do not trouble yourself about me. We were nearly lost one to the other. We could never have seen each other again. You will regret me, because one likes to know that one is beloved." There was, in fact, a sort of misunderstanding between the two women. Mme. du Deffand when in the society of Mme. Necker looked only for that which would distract her thoughts and amuse her mind; Mme. Necker, whose nature was wholly different, must have looked for some feeling

wherewith to satisfy her heart, and not finding this she drew back as though she had been wounded. The sceptical Chamfort says : " We have three categories of friends ; those who are indifferent to us, those whom we dislike, and those whom we hate." Mme. du Deffand wished to make of Mme. Necker a friend of the first of these categories; Mme. Necker very soon perceived this, and then Mme. du Deffand became for her a friend of the second category.

Not going outside the boundaries I have indicated, there was, it seems to me, nothing in the friendship between Mme. Necker and the Maréchale de Luxembourg, and also with Mme. du Deffand (whatever may have been the reputation of these two ladies in their younger days), which need cause us any surprise. Society has always lived, and always will live, according to those ideas of severe morality which takes note only of the things that it cannot ignore, and which calls to mind the things it cannot forget. This indulgent tolerance was extended further in the eighteenth century than is nowadays the case among ourselves. In the philosophical world, so to speak, in which Mme. Necker lived, Watelet[1] and Mme. Lecomte were

[1] Claude Henri Watelet was born in Paris in 1718 and died in 1780. There is a passage in the *Lettres d'un Voyageur* relating to the intimacy between Watelet and Marguérite Lecomte more poetical in its

received without objections being raised. Watelet was the farmer-general, the engraver, the academician, and the author of an *Essai sur les Jardins;* Mme. Lecomte had left her husband to live with Watelet at Moulin Joli. People used to go to dine there; and, with the exception of Mme. de Genlis,[1] whose affected prudery shows itself in her *Mémoires*, I do not know of any one who was astonished at seeing this irregular couple in Mme. Necker's drawing-room. Nevertheless, Mme. Necker, who had been brought up according to very different ideas, must have been ill at ease in society such as this, and the eagerness with which she cultivated the friendship of the Duchesse de Lauzun shows plainly enough how keenly she felt the charm of that which we should now call respectability in society.

We may perhaps wonder why she did not show a greater desire to become acquainted with those women who regarded virtue and honesty of conduct as an inheritance always preserved in their family (and these

expression than strictly accurate. Watelet was a wealthy man, and the house at Moulin Joli was kept up in splendour.

[1] Stéphanie Félicité Ducrest de Saint Aubin, Comtesse de Genlis, was born in the Château de Champcéry, near Autun, in 1746, and died in 1830. Besides her novels, her tales, and her plays, she has left ten volumes of *Mémoires*. Her austere judgment, which shows itself at every page, reminds one unconsciously of Lebrun's smart epigram:—

> "La Genlis se consume en efforts superflus;
> La vertu n'en veut pas, le vice n'en veut plus."

ladies were more numerous in the eighteenth century than is commonly believed); women who learnt from the world that they had duties to perform rather than pleasures to seek, and who lived a good, homely, and a God-fearing life. But we must not at the same time forget that these women were not anxious to extend their acquaintance beyond the circle of their own relations or of their natural friends. There can be no doubt that the conversations directed by the Maréchale de Luxembourg as she sat in her arm-chair, or by Mme. du Deffand from the bottom of her tub, were much less suitable for the ears of such a woman as Mme. Necker than the quiet and easy talk that went on between the Duchesse d'Ayen and her charming daughters in that large bedroom, resplendent with damask-coloured curtains and gilt fringes, which has been so well described to us by the author of the *Vie de la Marquise de Montagu.*[1] But strangers were not very

[1] Anne Louise Henriette d'Aguesseau, born in 1737, granddaughter of the Chancellor d'Aguesseau, had married in 1755 Jean Paul François de Noailles, Duc d'Ayen. By her marriage she had five daughters: Mlle. de Noailles, afterwards the Vicomtesse de Noailles; Mlle. d'Ayen, afterwards Marquise de la Fayette; Mlle. d'Epernon, afterwards Vicomtesse de Roure; Mlle. de Maintenon, Marquise de Montagu; and Mlle. de Montclar, afterwards Marquise de Grammont. As to the home life of the Duchesse d'Ayen, and the sort of education she gave to her daughters, we may read the *Notice sur la Vie de la Duchesse d'Ayen*, by Mlle. de la Fayette, and the *Vie de la Marquise de Montagu.*

readily admitted into the Hôtel de Noailles; and on the other hand, the Maréchale de Luxembourg from good humour, and Mme. du Deffand from curiosity, were both glad to welcome new faces. It is therefore natural enough that Mme. Necker should at first have made the acquaintance of women who showed themselves glad to receive her, and that those who in their younger days had not lived according to the strictest propriety were also those who were the most hospitable.

I must nevertheless confess that the contrast between the severity in her own mode of life upon which she prided herself, and the indulgence which at the same time she allowed to others (is not this however the best rule?) was one day brought as a reproach against her, as her old friends in Geneva had once reproached her for the welcome she extended to the philosophers, though she herself was always firm in her Protestant doctrines and in her Christian faith. As a matter of fact the censure came from a woman who inherited the taste for moralising people—the Marquise de la Ferté-Imbault, the daughter of Mme. Geoffrin. In every other respect it would be difficult to find two persons more unlike each other than this mother and daughter. Besotted with aristocratical notions since her marriage with an old nobleman, Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault professed a sovereign contempt for the circle of friends that used

to meet in her mother's drawing-room.[1] In conduct the mother was prudent and thoughtful, the daughter was rude and inconsiderate. In opposition to the customary tone of the conversations held by the men of letters and the philosophers whom Mme. Geoffrin took a pleasure in collecting around her—though she was ever ready to restrain any boldness in language—Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault founded a whimsical association which she called the *Lampoon Companions*, and the *Ladies of the Order of Fudge.* The province of these people was to simulate madness in conversation, to manufacture bad wit, but wit that should have in it a savour of cleverness. It was because of the difference between herself and her daughter that gave rise to Mme. Geoffrin's remark : "When I think of my daughter I feel like a hen who has hatched a duck's egg." The only sort of likeness between the two was in their taste for lecturing their friends ; and even in this the likeness was not perfect for Mme. Geoffrin used to cover her scoldings with so many precautions, and with so many kind words, and with so much

[1] Marie Thérèse Geoffrin, who was born in 1715, had married in 1733 a grandson of Jacques d'Estampes, Marquis de la Ferté-Imbault, Maréchal de France under Louis XIV. After she had been concerned, under the direction of the Comtesse de Marsan, with the education of Mesdames de Clotilde, and Élizabeth de France, and after she had written for them several volumes of maxims and moral essays, she died in 1791.

softness of manner that people bore with them kindly enough. On the other hand, Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault spoke out her mind to people more openly. She used frequently to meet Mme. Necker at her mother's house, and her first judgment upon her was full of that sort of ill-nature which she felt towards every one for whom her mother had shown any liking. But after a few years she learnt that Mme. Necker could speak her mind as plainly as she could, and that she was also as straightforward and as honest. Very shortly after M. Necker had been appointed to the office of Director of the Treasury, under the orders of M. Taboureau, who held the appointment of Controller-General—a situation that was delicate enough for both of them—Mme. Necker received one day a letter from Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault, couched in the following terms:—

PARIS, *19th February*, 1777.

You did me the honour, madam, to tell me last Monday that you were pleased to receive proofs of my frankness and of my experience of the world; and as I have a great regard for you, as I love and esteem M. Necker, such a declaration, madam, warmed my heart and my imagination towards you, as though you had been one of my Ladies of the Order of Fudge. I will now give you a proof. I saw yesterday, that is Tuesday, M. Tronchin at the house of Mme. la Présidente Molé;[1] I took

[1] Bonne Félicité Bernard, a daughter of the well known financier Samuel Bernard, had married Mathieu François Molé, Premier Président du Parlement de Paris, grandfather of the Comte Molé.

him aside, and I told him of the great interest I felt in you, and these are the ideas that occurred to me for your general welfare.

Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault, who was well acquainted with the Taboureau family, then proceeds to give some advice to M. and to Mme. Necker as to the way in which they ought to get round both the husband and the wife by flattering their vanity. She afterwards continues:—

You know, madam, that when I first had the honour of seeing you, you told me to put aside all ceremony; I therefore spoke to you frankly of the danger there was in the company with which you were surrounded, both for your happiness and also for the chance of your acquiring a name of high repute. No class of men are more decried, and with reason, in every order of society, than our wits of the present day and the women who run after them. When you first came to Paris, madam, what you saw at the Hôtel d'Enville must have opened your eyes to much that was passing in the world; but I remarked with great pleasure that you were deeply struck with the follies of society, as have been since both you and M. Necker at the ingratitude of people to whom you have been kind, and to whom you have rendered acts of service. All those people are the minions and cur-dogs of our charlatans, the philosophers. You have found out your fault, madam, happily both for you and for your husband; but those sort of connections are so diametrically opposed to the friends of Mme. Taboureau that she might not improbably be afraid of knowing you, partly from humility on her part, and also partly because your acquaintance with certain women who through their manners have brought themselves into disrepute, would always be a strong reason why honest women and their friends should be afraid to be brought into contact with persons, who, having the reputation of being people of wit, prove by the

companionship in which they take so much pleasure that they are not very difficult as to virtue nor as to the tone of manners of the friends with whom they associate.

Such, madam, are the thoughts that my affection for you has caused me to feel. I write to you in the greatest confidence, because I am so happily and so rationally endowed as never to attach too much importance to the good success of my advice or of my theories when I impart them to my friends. I have lived for forty years among people holding offices in the State, and I have also become well acquainted with them, and I have seen that all those fireside reflections which may appear to be the most true are often irrelevant because the statesman who views all the workings of the machine from too close a standpoint sees the impossibilities of the outside matter, which the person warmed by friendship or by possibilities does not see.

My letter can have no other value for you, madam, and for M. Necker, than that of showing to you my friendship, and that you are constantly in my thoughts. I send you the letter without reading it a second time; I am writing in my mother's bedroom, and she is asleep. I cannot do anything better than set my imagination at rest with those two people who are inflaming it.

Do not send me an answer; we will talk of this at length on Monday evening; in the meantime I present to you my respects.

As there was nothing to show that Mme. Necker was displeased at receiving this letter, Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault again wrote to her on the following day:—

PARIS, 20*th February*, 1777,
at nine o'clock in the morning.

I told you yesterday, madam, that my little message had eased my mind and my heart. I now feel inclined to send you

another message so that we may both thoroughly understand each other. I will now tell you of the different effects you have produced upon me since the time of your marriage, and also since the evening shortly after your marriage when I met you at the Duchesse d'Enville's at supper, because she knew that I had been acquainted with your husband for many years previously, and that I loved him and esteemed him very highly.

Our common friends at Geneva had given me a good opinion of your character, of your manners, and of your erudition; telling me, however, at the same time, that when in Paris you might perhaps run after the ideas that were then in fashion. That was a reason for me not to make advances to you, and even to deprive myself of the pleasure of seeing your husband at my house. I confess to you, madam, that I was anxious to see what friends you would make, and I admit that at the time they made such a strong impression upon me, and one so unfavourable to your power of discernment, that I felt certain I should never get over it.

The Maréchale, Mme. du Deffand, Mme. de Boufflers, and Mme. Marchais (in a lower degree) are four women in such bad repute because of their manners—and the two first are so dangerous—that for the last thirty years they have been held in horror by all honest-minded people. Then your intimate connection with the rascally abbé Morellet did you much harm at the time when the India Company was being talked about, in which your husband behaved so well and the abbé so very badly, that unless, madam, we had had common friends who did what they could to justify you, I should have thought as badly of your heart as I did of your understanding.

But your conduct has been very prudent and very good after what passed under the small ephemeral reign of M. Turgot. Since your husband has become a statesman you have not brought upon you the least public condemnation nor the slightest touch of ridicule; and also, madam, every time I

have had the honour of seeing you, you have shown to me friendship, esteem, and confidence—all these things taken together have fully made amends for the bad impressions that your excessive love for senseless wit and irrational virtue had left upon my mind. I will therefore, madam, put myself at your disposal both in heart and in understanding, you may make what use of me you will in my retreat; I will come to you willingly in the morning whenever you are so disposed, and in the afternoon I am always at home or at my mother's, and my door will then be always open to you.

You see, madam, from what I have said that I speak openly that I like frankness, and that I am worthy of your friendship since I desire it. This letter does not require an answer; but it may serve as an ambassador who will put us more at ease one with the other next Monday. You will make what use you like, madam, to our common friends, of these overtures, in which I have spoken to you from my heart; as for myself, I shall not speak about them to any one.

I send you my affectionate compliments.

It is almost needless to say that no one will implicitly believe in this austere judgment passed by Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault upon ladies whose names she mentions in her letter. It is not true that *they were held in horror by all honest minded people*, or that Mme. Necker did herself harm because of her acquaintance with people in their society. It may nevertheless be worthy of remark that, in those days when morality was at a low ebb, words and expressions, as severe as those we have just read, were used in reference to women, some of whom would nowadays be judged and spoken of more

reverently. Among these there was a friend of Mme. Necker's whose name frequently occurs in the memoirs of the times, though so much renown has not been accorded to her as to the three others; I mean Mme. de Marchais. Mme. de Marchais, whose maiden name was Julie de Laborde, was the wife of one of the first *valets de chambre du roi*—a situation which did not then imply menial service, as would now be the case, but was rather a sort of employment reserved for courtiers. In the letters which I have before me she is sometimes spoken of as the *gouvernante du Louvre*, and lodging was there provided for her. She was very small and was not pretty, but she had very lovely fresh coloured fair hair, which, when she chose to unloosen it so as to let it be seen, would fall down as low as her feet, and then her animated changeable countenance reflected all the vivacity of her spirit and of her character. Mme. de Marchais was in some way related to Mme. de Pompadour; she had sung at her little suppers, and she had made use of the favour which she enjoyed through her connection with the great lady, to make for herself a name in the world. By degrees she drew round about her a small society of people, of whom the doctor Quesnay[1]—Mme. de

[1] François Quesnay, born at Méry, near to Montfort l'Amaury, in 1694, died in 1774. He was the chief of the school of "physiocrates"

Pompadour's own physician — and some economists formed the first foundation. A few men of letters afterwards joined them, then some of the noblemen with whom she had become acquainted when she accompanied her husband upon his journeys to Marly or to Fontainebleau, and at last some women of quality who wished to know her because of the reputation she had acquired for her kindliness of manner, and her power of pleasing in company. Marmontel speaks of her in his *Memoirs:*—

Her society was composed of all the best people that were about the court, of those who were most esteemed for their manners, as well as of those who were distinguished for their talents among men of letters. With the courtiers she was a model of the most delicate and the most noble kind of politeness; the younger ladies used to visit her in order to learn her manners and her deportment. With the men of letters she was a match for the most ingenious, and she was upon a level with the most instructed. No one talked with greater ease, with such exactness, or with better method. Her silence was animated with the look as of one who was attentively listening; she guessed the thought, and her answers were as arrows which never missed their aim.

But let us see what Mme. Necker says, in an account she gave of her friendship with Mme. de Marchais, as to the fascination which this new friend

of whom the Marquis de Mirabeau, *l'ami des hommes*, was one of the most ardent disciples.

exercised upon her at the time of their first meeting:—

I felt a passionate affection for Mme. de Marchais; when I first saw her all the strings of my heart were paralysed. I thought I beheld one of those enchanting fairies who possess all the gifts of nature and of magic. I loved her, or rather I worshipped her. I followed her everywhere, and when she showed me any return for my affection, I thought that nothing more was wanting to complete my happiness.

This was shortly after my marriage. I loved, and I was loved in return. She was the only being to whom I confided all the secrets of my heart. I thought I had a double enjoyment when she divided all my pleasures and all my little troubles. At the commencement of our acquaintance I perceived that she had a secret attachment. We went together into every place where she might meet the man she loved. And he was always there at the time appointed. I had not known my friend for more than four months when she took me one day to a concert at the other end of Paris, at which there were only townsfolk present, and what I saw there served to show me exactly how matters stood between them. We spent the whole evening in a small room, and the object of her affections was by her side. I could not approve of this, but yet I was too soft-hearted not to be indulgent; though I recognised that one cannot always command one's feelings, I thought that he who was my idol would never have been guilty of such weakness. I was fully convinced that she was perfectly innocent in her love; and if a sigh escaped me it was because I could not altogether attribute to myself the pleasure she felt at being with me, and because I did not perceive that it was owing to my presence that she was enabled to see and to meet the man she loved.

Mme. Necker somewhat deceived herself when she judged her friend to be incapable of a weakness.

This man, whom Mme. de Marchais strove to see on every possible opportunity, was M. d'Angeviller, a gentleman in the household of the Dauphin,[1] general-superintendent of the royal buildings, and who, because of the delicacy of his features, was nicknamed "the angel Gabriel." There had been existing for a long time previously between M. d'Angeviller and Mme. de Marchais one of those close intimacies so frequent in the eighteenth century, as to which the secret was hidden from nobody; and in which, as was also the case in this instance, the friendship was made all the more firm by the fact that the lady in question was already married. After her husband's death Mme. de Marchais became Mme. d'Angeviller, and it was under this name that she was known to some persons now still alive, who knew her during the early years of the Restoration. But for some considerable period of time she and M. d'Angeviller had been very intimate together, and the mutual understanding between her and her husband was in nowise disturbed. The favours which Mme. de Marchais gave to M. d'Angeviller did not at all lessen the outward respect

[1] Charles Claude de Flahaut, Comte de la Billarderie d'Angeviller, or d'Angiviller, general-superintendent of the royal buildings, gardens, manufactories, and academies, remained in office until the Revolution. He then emigrated to Russia, where he lived upon a pension allowed to him by the Empress Catherine II. He died in 1810.

which he ever continued to show her; all the memoirs of the time agree in saying that the attentions which he paid to her always gave him the air of a timid and an unfortunate lover. He often sent to her as presents baskets filled with the choicest fruits from the royal gardens, over which he had the superintendence; and as Mme. de Marchais used to divide the contents of these baskets with her friends, her attentions to others had won for her, at a time when nicknames were the mode, the name of "Pomona."

Whether it was simple-mindedness on the part of Mme. Necker as to the purity of the attachment between Mme. de Marchais and M. d'Angeviller, or whether she acquiesced in the situation that was known to all the world, it would appear that Mme. Necker allowed her name to be mixed up in the intimacy which the constant assiduity of M. d'Angeviller imposed upon her. In her letters to Pomona, she speaks of him as often as of M. de Marchais, and frequently in the same postscript she asks to be told of the news of them both. But when Mme. de Marchais is ill, Mme. Necker writes to M. d'Angeviller to inquire about her friend, and his answers are full of intimate details which ought to satisfy the most affectionate interest on the part of Mme. Necker. In Mme. de Marchais' letters the names of her husband and of M. d'Angeviller occur

so frequently that it is difficult to guess which of the two holds the more important place, if not in her heart, at least in her daily life. Writing to Mme. Necker from a country house where she had been summoned because of some troublesome business, she speaks very highly of M. d'Angeviller's kindness to her, for he assists her in unravelling some long-standing accounts; and she adds: "There is the journey to Fontainebleau, I must go there to be able to assist M. de Marchais. I do not reckon upon being able to get away before the 2nd or the 3rd—and this bothers me very much. But one must submit to necessities, and begin by doing that which is most important." A few letters, chosen partly at random from the voluminous correspondence between Mme. de Marchais and Mme. Necker, will show better than any words that I can use what was the style and the tone of their correspondence. Here is a letter written by Mme. de Marchais:—

11 *o'clock.*

My dearest friend, it is I who am truly withering away from sorrow and trouble because I cannot see you. Impatience is making my blood run dry, and does not bring about those happy moments which loving friendship so ardently desires. So close to you, always thinking of you, always inhaling your thoughts, and yet everything separates me from you! I shall not see to-morrow, nor yet for some time, that place of delights with

which my heart wants so much to become acquainted. The latest arrangements made as to my house and the *savagery* of M. de Marchais, keep me in a state of dependence which renders me helpless. Have pity upon me ; love me, and forgive me for scrawling so badly, for I am in the water, and it is impossible to form a single letter. Love must act as my interpreter, and will show in each word that is so ill-written *him* who is so deeply engraven in my heart. Dear me ! how long it is before Wednesday ! It is for dinner, I hope. That was arranged with Mme. d'Houdetot, was it not ? How shall I be able to embrace M. Necker in my present position ? We must let him alone this time, and I will only stretch forth my arms to greet his dearest wife.

In reply to these tender effusions Mme. Necker answers in the same tone and with the same degree of enthusiasm :—

My darling friend will have seen that my heart was flying towards her when her own kindness brought her close to me, and that I was much touched with her warm-hearted letter. The soft sympathy of our two souls, my admiration for your virtues, the inexpressible charm in all your thoughts, in all your actions, in all your words—everything in fact, fills me with one idea, of which you only can be the cause. Imagine, therefore, my sorrow in hearing of your relapse, of your daily misfortunes, and that you do not wish that I should be near to you. I should like to disobey your orders if I did not fear to displease you. But time is advancing, and I am still condemned to look upon your stay at Versailles as imperative. But if you could put aside a thousand importunities you would be able to enjoy friendship. It would find wings with which to fly to you, and already in a glance I have covered all the space that separates Paris from Versailles. Adieu, my dearest, my beautiful, my darling friend. I embrace you. I press you against my breast, or rather against

my soul, for it seems to me that there can be no interval between yours and mine.

Allow me, my lovely one, to wish to be remembered to M. d'Angeviller.

PARIS, *4th Nov.*, 1774.

While Mme. de Marchais was travelling about in the suite attached to the court, Mme. Necker kept her informed as to what was going on in Paris. The reader may perhaps be glad to see a letter in which she speaks of some performances which Mme. d'Epinay had organised for the theatre at La Chevrette :—

You have told me, my dearest and lovely friend, to send you word to Fontainebleau of what I am doing. I am glad to think that you should take some interest in me; but, as you know well enough, your power over me is so great that your hatred even could not destroy it. Wholly given up to loving you, I rarely seek to unravel your sentiments towards myself; but still I have at the bottom of my heart the sweet assurance that so deep an affection ought to bring with it some return from the dearest soul that exists in all the world.

Our life is so uniform that I have no interesting news to give you. M. Thomas is staying with us; but he lives far more with the Czar and with the Russians.[1] He seems to forget that there should be among this savage nation all the faults that exist among civilised people. He is happy and almost joyful, so true is it that thought is a sovereign remedy against those evils which affect the imagination. *Les Prétentions* of the Chevalier

[1] Thomas was then writing a poem oi which Peter the Great was the hero; it was his intention to call the poem *La Pétréide.*

de Chastellux has been played twice at La Chevrette.[1] It had a very great success, every sentence was applauded, and it is impossible to disguise more artfully the want of dramatic action. The actresses also distinguished themselves very considerably, and seem to acquire every day a greater degree of perfection. Since I have seen nice and well-mannered women act so well, those at the Comédie Française have become insufferable to me. On Sunday we shall have *Romeo and Juliet*, the most tragic play of the tragical Shakespeare. The Chevalier has translated it into prose, and has arranged it after his own fashion. The success, perhaps, is doubtful. I have not read it, but it seems to me that it is a very great undertaking, both for the author and for the actors. M. Watelet has also tried his hand upon the same piece. That is, I think, all our literary news. I like to concern myself with things that may amuse you. Experience and friendship have both taught me that abstract and solitary knowledge contribute very little to happiness. We should endeavour to join our ideas and our sentiments. This is what I do every day, for I never cease to think of my dear friend, to whom I send a million kisses since she is willing to accept them.

SAINT-OUEN, 16*th October*.

Should not we all have thought that two women who wrote to one another so affectionately would have always remained firm friends? The friendship, however, was broken by a frivolous quarrel, so frivolous indeed that it is impossible to believe in the reason alleged by Mme. de Marchais. The latter lady had invited the Maréchale de Luxembourg, the Comte and the Comtesse

[1] François Jean, at first Chevalier afterwards Marquis de Chastellux, was born in Paris in 1734, and died in 1788. He was the author of a book entitled *La Félicité Publique*, which met with some success. He was a member of the French Academy.

de Broglie (which was rather a bold proceeding on the part of the wife of a *valet de chambre* of the king) to a reading of some verses at her own house by an obscure poet whose name was Rocher. Mme. Necker, too, was asked, but as she had also been invited by Mme. Saurin[1] to hear La Harpe[2] read, and as she had already heard Rocher read his verses, she thought that she might very well go there an hour after the time specified. Unfortunately, Rocher, whom she met at Mme. Saurin's, thought that he ought to accompany Mme. Necker; consequently the grand folk assembled in Mme. de Marchais' drawing-room had to wait there for a very considerable time, to the great annoyance of the hostess. And when Mme. Necker entered she turned her back upon her friend, and the next day, in answer to a letter in which Mme. Necker had written to express her sorrow, Mme. de Marchais answered with much acrimony: "These great ladies do not belong to

[1] Mme. Saurin was the wife of the dramatic poet, Bernard Joseph Saurin, who was born in Paris in 1706, and died in 1781. He was a member of the French Academy. He was the author of the well known line engraved upon the pedestal of the bust of Molière, which was afterwards placed in the meeting room of the French Academy:—

"Rien ne manque à sa gloire ; il manquait à la nôtre."

[2] Jean François de la Harpe was born at Paris in 1739, and died in 1803. In the archives at Coppet there are a certain number of letters written by La Harpe to Mme. Necker, but they are most uninteresting.

our set in society; we invite them with the intention of pleasing them and amusing them. And we hope to gain our object by purposely causing them to wait by themselves for an hour and a half!"

In spite of all Mme. Necker's efforts, the quarrel grew to be so bitter that the friendship was at last broken off, and Mme. de Marchais sent back to Mme. Necker all her letters. The slight fault of which Mme. Necker was perhaps unconsciously guilty was too trifling to give rise to so much resentment. Mme. de Marchais showed her real cause of complaint when in a letter she told Mme. Necker, "that the fine ladies had made her tired of friendship." Her own vanity had been wounded because these great ladies, who did not belong to her set in society, had admitted Mme. Necker into their intimacy. With all her cleverness, her wit, and her suppleness, she had not been able to raise herself above the not very elevated rank which Mme. de la Ferté-Imbault had assigned to her; but Mme. Necker, owing to the respect which she everywhere inspired, to the security of her friends, to the dignity of her conduct, she gradually made her way into the best company, and into houses where the door would not do more than stand ajar to admit Mme. de Marchais. Such a trifling incident proved sufficient to make this poor-hearted woman

collect in her heart so much spite that a single drop of water caused it to overflow; but Mme. Necker was at any rate freed from an acquaintance who at first had taken advantage of her innocence, and from a woman who could never have been her friend.

CHAPTER X.

LA COMTESSE D'HOUDETOT.

MME. NECKER found more constancy and a greater charm in her friendship with a woman whose name recalls to one's mind the most poetical recollections of the eighteenth century—with the Comtesse d'Houdetot. Who has not read in the ninth book of *Mes Confessions*, the narrative of those long promenades in an enchanted country, where the imprudent Sophie,[1] as the impassioned lover, spoke to Rousseau of Saint Lambert,[2] and made him drink long draughts from the poisoned cup, of which, as yet, he had only tasted the sweetness? Who does not recollect the conversation in the woods at Eaubonne, of which the scene in the woods of Clarens

[1] Sophie de Lalive de Bellegarde, born in 1731, sister of Mme. d'Épinay's husband, married Claude César Constant, Comte d'Houdetot, of a Norman family. She lived until 1813.

[2] Jean François, Marquis de Saint Lambert, was born at Nancy in 1716, and died in 1803. He was the author of the poem *Les Saisons*.

has reproduced only the troubles and the dangers? A few burning pages have been sufficient to cast an immortal light upon this woman, who was both weak and faithful; who, in her love for Saint Lambert, gathered strength enough to fight against a love for Rousseau. And yet, in this portrait of her, sketched by a writer of genius, perhaps she appears to us to be less attractive than in those celebrated verses where she has painted herself, and described with perfect candour her never ceasing want for some one whom she might love:—

> Jeune, j'aimai; ce temps de mon bel âge,
> Ce temps si court, l'amour seul le remplit.
> Quand j'atteignis la saison d'être sage,
> Encor j'aimai, la raison me le dit.
> Mais l'âge vient et le plaisir s'envole;
> Mais mon bonheur ne s'envole aujourd'hui;
> Car j'aime encore et l'amour me console,
> Rien n'aurait pu me consoler de lui.

And also in these, where we see so much touching sentiment, which, in spite of the wrinkles of old age, she addresses to her last friend, M. de Sommariva [1]:—

> Je touche aux bornes de ma vie;
> Vous avez embelli les derniers de mes jours.
> Qu'un si cher souvenir se conserve toujours
> Vivez heureux pour votre amie.

[1] Jean Baptiste Sommariva, born at Milan in 1760, died in 1828, was in 1799 Governor of the Cisalpine Republic. After the downfall of this republic he came to live in Paris; it was there that he became acquainted with Mme. d'Houdetot.

Si quelque sentiment occupe encor votre âme,
Ne vous refusez pas un bien si précieux;
Seulement en goûtant le charme de sa flamme,
Dites-vous quelquefois : Elle m'aimait bien mieux.

Thoughts such as these would not occur to us in thinking of Mme. Necker; but what a charming creature would she have been who had possessed the grace of the one woman, and at the same time all the severities of the other! These differences, however, did not prevent an intimacy quickly forming itself between them, and I imagine that the friendship was first made not in Paris, but in the country. La Chevrette, where Mme. d'Houdetot went frequently to stay with her sister-in-law, Mme. d'Épinay, Sannois and Eaubonne, were all places not very far distant from Saint Ouen. We shall see that Mme. d'Houdetot's first letter to Mme. Necker was written with the object of inviting her to the theatrical performances that were then going on at La Chevrette:—

There will be a great alteration, madam, in the programme of the performance at La Chevrette. In the first place, we shall not on Wednesday have the piece written by the Chevalier (de Chastellux); there will be no performance at all that day. It will not be played before Saturday, certainly, and I am not quite sure that it ever will be played. On Tuesday we shall have *Dupuis et Desronais*[1] and *Le Muet de Bagdad*, a new play, by an

[1] *Dupuis et Desronais*, a comedy in three acts, written in verses of different metre, by Collé, was played for the first time at the Théâtre Français, in 1763.

author whose name is not known. It is already spoken of very highly. I should much like to excite your curiosity to see this piece, and to make you come here on Tuesday to join us in our excursion on Wednesday. Let me ask you not to refuse to give us the pleasure that I had promised myself of having you here at least for one day. M. de Saint Lambert joins with me in saying that *Le Muet de Bagdad* will be extremely pretty. I am especially anxious that we should not lose anything because of this alteration in the programme, and it would be a double loss of pleasure to me if you could not come to see our play. On Thursday I go back to Les Ternes, and I am looking forward with delight in the hope of seeing you.

The friendship which you are kind enough to show me, madam, and the pleasure of your society, will console me for leaving my retreat, but it cannot prevent me from feeling the great distance between us, and especially at this season of the year.

SANNOIS, *Sunday, 4th November.*

At this early period of their acquaintance, when the two ladies were courteous and kind one to the other, before they had become intimate, Mme. d'Houdetot, then staying at the Château de Novient, near to Pont à Mousson, wrote to Mme. Necker the following letter:—

You had promised me, madam, that you would write to me, and this promise was so flattering to me that I cannot help now reminding you of it. In the midst of all the pleasures of the charming society with which you are surrounded, do not forget one who so fully recognised the value of making your acquaintance, and who so earnestly desires to cultivate your friendship. That part of the country where I am now living is not pretty enough for me to write to you about it; life here is pleasant, but

not very animated. Still, your keen appreciation might afford you some amusement and some interest at seeing people made happy by their simple and honest tastes, and by all the domestic pleasures of a country life. I would say more about the latter were they more in accordance with your daily practice but of the former you already possess most fully all the advantages. And I hope, madam, I may long see you continue to enjoy them. I could not know you without interesting myself in your happiness, and without making it a part of my pleasure to obtain some portion of your friendship. Please say a thousand kind things from me to M. Necker; I feel the sacrifice I am making in drawing myself away from both of you, and for so long a time. I hope that neither of you will forget me; and accept, madam, for yourself, the assurance of all the sentiments which I have vowed to you for the rest of my life, and with which I have the honour to be your very humble and very obedient servant,

LALIVE D'HOUDETOT.

M. de Saint Lambert tells me to give his best compliments. He hopes to have the pleasure of offering them to you himself; but he will not lose the opportunity of assuring you of his respect and of his regard for you.

When Mme. d'Houdetot wrote this letter hardly ten years had passed since her connection with Rousseau; and in these lines we may trace something of the *Nouvelle Héloïse,* and of those country pleasures which Mme. d'Houdetot indirectly reproached Mme. Necker for not knowing. But would she herself have felt them so keenly if Rousseau had not first taught her how to appreciate them? This same influence may also be seen in little philosophical wanderings scattered here and there in Mme. d'Houdetot's letters. As I cannot

give them all, I prefer to choose those in which this graceful and attractive woman paints herself such as she was—ardent, sensitive, soft and impassioned, gay and sad, often at the same time, but always gracious in her manner, and always lovable. Nothing can be more charming than her expression of affection shown in the little letter which she sent accompanying the present of a basket of fruit:—

I send you, my darling, the article, "*Spartiate*,"[1] written by M. de Saint Lambert, and also the last currants in my garden. The one will give pleasure to your pure mind; and by the other I would remind you of your lovely body, which you too often forget. I confess to you coarsely that I like to think of mine; and it pleases me to give you, when I can do so, something to think of that will agreeably occupy your thoughts. You have my last flowers, you will have my last fruit, and you may be very sure to have, until the last moment of my life, all the good wishes of my heart. Yesterday we were very disagreeably interrupted. I blame myself for having occupied the few last minutes of our dinner with my own poor affairs. Love me! If I have your heart, and also that of our friend, I cannot be unhappy. You know that he only is unhappy who can neither love, nor work, nor die, and I am very far from being in such a condition. Receive the homage of M. de Saint Lambert, and all the assurances of our loving friendship.

"He only is unhappy who can neither love, nor work, nor die." This is one of those lines that show a fine

[1] This was probably an article intended for the supplement to the *Encyclopédie*. The first edition of the *Encyclopédie* was published in 1772; it contained no proper names.

heart, and a deeper and a truer definition of what is unhappiness never fell from a woman's pen. This affectionate woman again describes herself in a letter which she wrote to Mme. Necker, fearing that she had given her some cause for complaint:—

I come to say a word to my dearest friend, to chat for a moment with her, just for the pleasure of telling her that I love her, to relieve my troubled heart that I should have given her an instant's annoyance, and without expecting an answer, without even wishing for one, for she shall not know of my address. I like to give her disinterested proofs of the affection that attaches me to her.

My darling, your note in answer to that one which I wrote to you as I was going away made me drop many and many a tear. Sustain the weakness of your delicate frame, worn out by over activity, from the strength of your heart. Enjoy the happiness of being perfectly beloved by every one who is dear to you, and the hope of living and preserving to them that which has become necessary to their happiness. The desire to preserve all the objects of my affection keeps me alive, and for me it throws a halo over all nature, and over everything else. Without them what pleasures could life offer to me that would be worthy of the strong and sensitive feelings that heaven has placed within me? May I never give them cause for sorrow, for that would be one of the greatest troubles that I could endure. But forgive these little wailings, for I am sure you must love the reason that causes them, and for you they are not difficult to cure. My dearest friend, the least of your attentions, the smallest of all your kind thoughts, goes to my heart, and anything which has the slightest appearance of carelessness or indifference easily affects me, but one word from your mouth is sufficient to cure all things.

You know that I have less faith in vows than in plain words ;

and, my dear friend, who knows your worth better than I do? It is your simple honesty of purpose, and your kindness of feeling, that stamps you. Your good will, of which I cannot and will not doubt, is the cause that binds me to you for the remainder of my life. I embrace you a thousand times, and press you warmly to my heart.

Before I conclude, I cannot refuse myself the pleasure of giving one more letter in which the natures of the two women may be seen vividly contrasted: the one uneasy, restless, inhaling every breath of happiness; the other peaceful, playful, adapting herself with a feeling of careless melancholy to the common annoyances in life. Mme. Necker was then drinking the waters at Mont Dore; her husband and Thomas were also with her:—

SANNOIS, *11th July.*

My dearest friend has wished to give me proofs of her affection. I hope that she is fully persuaded that I could not enjoy anything from which I feared that any harm might happen to her, for I should be uneasy lest I was the cause of the misfortune. This mutual confidence can alone give me tranquillity, and she has promised me to respect it. I conjure her not to forget it, and to make me write to her whenever it will give her any trouble to write to me. I receive with delight everything that her heart sends me. I enjoy the pleasure of being beloved by you, and that of seeing that you sometimes think of me. I can imagine a charming picture of your arrival at Mont Dore, and of the expressions of gratitude from those people to whom you have done so much good. The soft emotions are not to be feared; may you keep within them. They will give you full matter for thought without fatiguing you; they will give animation to your life without wearing it out.

Take example from the easy quietude which M. Necker displays. It is, no doubt, less attractive than the warmth and the activity of your other travelling companion, but it is more salutary. You should give yourself some repose. I will always repeat this to you, for I think this remedy would be the one most beneficial to your health.

Since you went away I have had a pleasant trip through a country altogether different from ours. There were mountains, forests, and a fine and extensive view ; we were in the neighbourhood of several royal houses, which are no doubt very handsome, but these are ornaments readily exchanged for more simple places, and make one more fully appreciate the value of the latter (rather after the Rousseau fashion, you know); in a word, a country made poetical by its strong features and by their contrasts. In the place where I was staying I met an honest, kind, simple-minded man, just like the natural beauties of his own country. I felt all that; I drew his picture, I sung his praises, and felt a pleasure in doing so. I will send you the verses I made; they may give you a moment's amusement. They will tell you that I was happy when I wrote them, and that I was revelling in a pleasant train of thought. My ideas have become much changed since my best friend has recovered, and since my dear creature is also, I hope, on the road to recovery. All my pleasant thoughts have come back to me; you know that I enjoy to dwell upon them. Whenever anything pleases me I write verses about it; and, not binding myself to any task, I pass my days easily, not in idleness, but without wearisomeness, as also without pretension or ambition of any sort. What have we more to desire when we can enjoy the pleasures of friendship and of nature? We may then pass lightly over the other small troubles of life.

M. de Saint Lambert accompanied me on this journey. He always wishes that I should say *we* in my expressions of regard to you. Your destiny is to be beloved. Enjoy this happiness, which of all is the most precious, and take care of yourself that you may enjoy it for a long time to come.

Your friends, absent or present, must often tell you the same thing. But I am not at all astonished at the attitude of the two persons who are accompanying you, and whom you describe to me so well :—

> On voit souvent, suivant son sort,
> L'amour changer de caractère :
> Heureux, un amant s'endort,
> Malheureux, il veille pour plaire.

It may be seen that in this friendship Saint Lambert occupied the same place that M. d'Angeviller did in the friendship between Mme. Necker and Mme. de Marchais. He often writes to Mme. Necker endeavouring to procure for Mme. d'Houdetot a consultation with the celebrated Genevese physician, Doctor Tronchin; or else he confides to her his attempts to induce M. d'Houdetot to be more considerate in his treatment of his wife. On her side, Mme. d'Houdetot never loses the occasion of joining the name of M. de Saint Lambert in the warm expressions of feeling for Mme. Necker, and often she seems to put them both upon an equal footing in her affections :—

We are both united (she wrote to Mme. Necker), M. de Saint Lambert and I, in our love for you. This is one of the things in which he agrees with me. The happiness of my life is to have met you both, and to be beloved by both of you.

And in another letter :—

I will confess to you, and I told you so before at the beginning of our acquaintance, that my affections are not altogether free

from passion; but who can reproach me for the few friends to whom I have given my heart? When I love you both, when I love my worthy friend Saint Lambert, it may be doubted whether it is virtue that makes me love such friends, or whether it is they who give me the taste for virtue. I may tell you, with the confidence of old friendship, that I have never loved or even cared for anything that did not put into my mind some thoughts such as these. I hope that you know me well enough not to attach any idea of vanity to this avowal. My dearest friend, such are my feelings towards you; allow me to show myself worthy of the kind words that you use in expressing your sentiments towards me. If I have ever enjoyed a pure happiness it has been when I have felt myself esteemed and beloved by those for whom I feel esteem and also a real affection.

Women of bygone ages, so charming and so noble even in your failings, do you in truth deserve those harsh judgments which, according to our present more rigorous code of morals, according to our present more austere principles, we are sometimes tempted to prefer against you, or ought we not rather to take into account the peculiar circumstances in which you were placed? When, after having existed for so many centuries, the whole body of society began to be diffident of its own strength and considered itself as in honour bound to destroy instead of to reform;—when the ancient religion, founded upon faith as the basis of all existence, seemed to be giving way under the blows of philosophy, of which the language everywhere echoed the words tolerance and liberty, formulated so as to

win to its side all generous hearts;—when everything was crumbling away, and also renewing itself at the same time;—need we then be much astonished that you should have rushed eagerly into those unknown paths, and that, without a guide to direct your way, your route should have been marked by more than one false step? In the enthusiasm for love and for virtue, of which your language so often offers a singular admixture, was everything declamation, hypocrisy, and falsehood; or did you not rather seek, even in your weaker moments, to perceive and to attain to a certain ideal of which some confused notion was floating vaguely in your minds? You had been taught to believe no longer, and the narrow path of duty, shorn of all its sweetness, appeared to you hard and difficult; but you had the wish for noble ideas, for high sentiments, and you innocently thought that you could let sensibility stand in the place of moral duties. Let us not forget, too, that there were many of you who, during the Reign of Terror, mounted the scaffold with magnanimous courage; and that there were others who, after having cheerfully submitted to the trials of emigration, have offered to the new generation the spectacle of a worthy and dignified old age. Let us beware, therefore, if we wish to keep within the bounds of justice and of truth, of the coarse censures which the rough

spirit of intolerant minds would now cast upon your delicate figures, and also of those complacent illusions which seek in you the model of forgotten virtues; but let us enjoy, not without reserve, though without pedantry, the charm attaching to those old letters which have flown easily and as by chance from your soft and facile pen.

> J'aime à vous voir dans vos cadres ovales,
> Portraits fanés des belles du vieux temps,
> Tenant en main des roses un peu pâles,
> Comme il convient à des fleurs de cent ans.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GENTLEMEN—MOULTOU.

"FRIENDSHIP among women is perhaps rarer," as was said by a writer of the last century; "but, when we find it, we must allow that it is more delicate and also more loving. Men, as a rule, display more of the operations than of the soft graces of friendship. Sometimes in endeavouring to give solace they wound, and their tenderest feelings are not keenly alive to small matters. Women, on the other hand, have a perception for details which shows them everything. Nothing escapes their notice. They can divine friendship when it is silent, they encourage friendship when it is timid, they offer gentle consolation to friendship when it is suffering. With instruments finer than those given to men, they know how to administer to a heart that is ill at ease, they can give it rest, and they can deaden its violent throbbings. They can give a value to a thousand things which in themselves are worthless. We might

perhaps desire a man for our friend upon great occasions, but for the happiness of every day we should ask for the friendship of a woman."

He who, in an *Essai sur les Femmes,* wrote these lines that were prompted by such fine and noble sentiments, must have been guided by the thought of Mme. Necker, and in exchange he made her enjoy the happiness of every day life. But nevertheless I shall not begin by speaking of Thomas in that portion of my work which is specially intended to make us better acquainted with the intimate life of Mme. Necker; for we ought rather to consider first those persons for whom she always showed her greatest preference. If Thomas was to her a good and true friend, if Buffon was ever ready to show her a respectful adoration, which she repaid by almost filial tenderness, both of these men held in her affections a very much smaller place than that given to Moultou, whose name has already been mentioned several times. The reader will not have forgotten the young minister, the brother-in-law of a girl who had been the friend of Suzanne Curchod, and the man who had been mixed up in all the most trying circumstances of her life while she was as yet unmarried. Mme. Necker's intimacy with him was of a nature that when lost could not be replaced; these two hearts had no need to explain

themselves one to the other and to express their mutual desires, for the one instantly guessed and felt all the innermost wishes of the other. When a rare combination of circumstances has given rise to this intimacy between a man and a woman, and neither has any cause to fear that it may be troubled by untoward events, it is then one of those exquisite enjoyments to be appreciated only by refined natures, and which without having all the giddiness of love, can nevertheless relish all the sweetness of its charm. Such was the connection between Mme. Necker and Moultou, a tie narrow as it was firm, and which was never slackened by twenty-three years of nearly total separation. During these twenty-three years an active correspondence was kept up between them, and this correspondence, which would form a very large sized volume, has been of great value to me in studying the character of Mme. Necker. It is almost a looking-glass, in which are reflected in all their sincerity and all their impulsive vivacity her impressions, as they successively formed themselves in her mind during the course of a busy and a varied life. The first time that letters were exchanged between them was as far back as the days when Suzanne Curchod was much perplexed with the increasing difficulties of her situation, when she was living with Mme. de Vermenoux. She then wrote to him:—

You are unjust to me, my dear friend. Why should I distrust you? Why should I conceal any thought from you? I should be then both unjust and ungrateful. If there ever was a moment in which I wished to hide my thoughts from you it was from anger against my own self, not because I was acting unfairly towards you. I thought that I had become indifferent to you and it seemed to me that I could no longer be of interest to any one. It was by excess of friendship that I seemed to fail. But all that has passed away; should it return life would be useless to me. . . . It was jealousy that put into my breast those words which you so ill interpreted, and I have been sufficiently punished. I could never endure to think that I should not have the foremost place in your friendship, and my heart revolted against every effort I made to suppress this unworthy feeling. Forgive me, I pray you, though I can never forgive myself.

After Suzanne Curchod had become Mme. Necker, their mutual expressions of warm friendship were in nowise altered. "One attachment," she wrote to him, "instead of destroying another, gives to it a new strength;" and she always continued to write to him in the same open and easy manner. It was especially in her unhappy moments that she chose him as her confidant, either because she felt herself to bend under the burden of life, which is often heavy, even for those who are well-to-do, or because the uncertain state of her health often made her imagination place a gloomy perspective before her mind.

My dear Moultou does me justice in his heart, and it is to him that I appeal. He knows that nothing can efface him from my

memory, and that even death, in changing the nature of my being, could not change the nature of my thoughts. For if in after life we attain to a higher degree of perfection, our attachment founded upon gratitude, upon admiration, and upon a knowledge of all that is good, must also acquire a greater strength. During the last month my pregnancy has become unbearable, and I am impatient that the time should come, even though it were to cost me my life. These thoughts are often in my mind, my dear friend, and that is the reason why I now write to you in spite of the pain which is pressing me. I could not let go by a time that is never free from danger without again repeating to you, with that candour which has never left me, that my heart is altogether in your hands, and that the sweetness of your character, far more than the greatness of your mind, has made me for ever devoted to you. Assure your dear and darling wife that the recollection of her kindness is ineffaceably engraved in my memory, and that I never think of her without tears coming into my eyes. If I die, mourn for me sometimes, both of you, as the dearest of your friends; and if God preserves my life think also sometimes that the remembrance of you makes it precious to me. Adieu, my dear friend. I have not strength to say more. It will be long before I can write to you again, but I shall not for a moment cease to love you.

This letter threw Moultou into a state of great excitement, and he instantly endeavoured to dissipate the melancholy thoughts of his friend by recalling to her mind everything that could make her happy. "Tronchin writes to me," he told her, "that your husband adores you. He cannot help doing so; for every one that knows you must love you. Whoever lives with you can live only for your sake."

But he did not always answer Mme. Necker's letters with so much zeal. Sometimes she was obliged to write to him two or three times before she could obtain from him a reply; and her correspondence is full of affectionate but incessant complaints because her friend allows too long intervals to elapse between all his letters to her. "If you could imagine," she says to him, "how much pleasure your letters give me you would be stung with remorse for having so long deprived me of it. Your friendship is one of the foundations essential to my happiness. How is it that you could have abstained so long from showing any signs of it?" To these affectionate reproaches Moultou would allege his occupations as an excuse. He was sometimes over busy in the defence that he was bound to prepare for his friend Rousseau; sometimes he had to interfere and take part in the quarrels between the *bourgeois* and the *natifs*.[1] But there was also some systematic reason for all his long intervals of silence. Of a proud and sensitive nature, Moultou showed himself to be warmly interested in his friends

[1] In the political language of Geneva, the term *bourgeois* was applied to those who, by virtue of their birth, were invested with the exclusive right of participating in the government of the Republic; the *natifs* were those who were born on the territory of Geneva of foreign parents, and they were denied this right, and they were also debarred from following certain professions.

when he could do anything for them to lessen their troubles; and, on the other hand, when he knew them to be happy an instinct, that some people may understand, moved him to draw himself in a way from them and from their happiness, and not to seem to ask for anything for himself. But at last he confessed to Mme. Necker the secret motives of his reserve, and this brought down upon him more affectionate reproaches:—

You know so well how to repair your faults that one is tempted to forgive them; but, my dear Moultou, I cannot forget them. The instant that you appeared to cease to love me made great holes in my heart. What! You abandon your friends as soon as they are comfortable? That is what I have always feared. What is that cruel benevolence that lives only in sorrow, and which, instead of sharing the happiness of one's friends, lessens it so far as it is in its power to do so? Yes; you are hard, barbarous even, in the reasons that you allege. Will you constrain me to consider that my pleasures are indifferent to you? You know, my dear friend, they would instantly become poisoned; and that I have never found any real happiness but that which has come from an affectionate heart. You know also that all my troubles come from the same cause, and you would remind me of it cruelly if you ceased to love me—I may even say to regard me—for however much you may be deceived by your strong imaginations, you never, never, will replace me. I feel this to be true, because I have in my heart an endless affection which has resisted every attack, and even the injustice of which your imagination has made you guilty. My self love may have been hurt, but my heart will not give me the time to feel the wound.

Although Mme. Necker used to say that absence was "a knife that cut your friend's image upon your heart," she nevertheless did not easily make up her mind to the constant separation from him who was the companion of her girlhood, and she used fondly to indulge in the idea of trying to persuade him to come to Paris. When M. Necker, coming to the Control Office, was obliged to resign his position as Minister of the Republic of Geneva in Paris, Mme. Necker for a short while thought of making him recommend Moultou to the Magnificent Council as his successor; and she wrote to Moultou asking him how she should best act in the matter. "You must recollect," she said, "that it is my own happiness that I am putting in your hands, that it is for myself I am pleading, and that this obligation will be one of the greatest of all those which I have such pleasure in calling to mind." But whether it was because Moultou was only lukewarm in seconding the zeal shown by Mme. Necker, or whether it was owing to the fact that as a son of a French refugee he was not therefore regarded with favour among the old families of the Genevese aristocracy, who, since the days of Calvin, divided between themselves somewhat narrowly any office conferring power and also the distribution of honours, the negotiations failed; and

Mme. Necker had then to fall back upon the hope of being able to draw Moultou to Paris, to spend some weeks in her company. It was eleven years since they had seen each other when Moultou told her that he would yield to her demands, and she answered him immediately :—

Is it really true, sir, that you are coming to see us ? I shall be able to show to the friend of my youth how much all the affection which I then felt for him has grown in my heart. I shall begin to love once more. Everything that I shall see in your company will again have for me all the charm of novelty. Your rooms are quite ready in the General Control Office ; you and your son will both be there. You shall be free or you shall be in slavery, for if you wish it I will deprive you of all your liberty. I will take you everywhere, I will be your shadow in every place of amusement, in the libraries, in society, and in the country. I will decide how you shall employ every hour in the day. If this bondage is not agreeable to you, you may go out and come in, you may have your own society, you may dine and sup where you please without telling me, and I will ignore that you are in my house unless a vague notion of happiness comes to remind me of it.

Those moments in life are both rare and short in which our happiness is so complete and so sweet that our heart has only a vague notion that so much good fortune is by our side ; and again, this happiness is vouchsafed only to those whose conscience is pure and whose life is unspotted. After he had stayed a few months in Paris, during which time Moultou—if we

may believe Mme. Necker's letters to his wife—achieved a great success in the best company, and "enchanted every one by his wit, his knowledge, and his charming manners," he was at last obliged to return to Geneva. Mme. Necker had got so well accustomed to see by her side every day the best friend of her young days, that her husband, with much affectionate solicitude, fearing the emotion that she would feel—her health being always very delicate—when the day for saying farewell was close at hand, agreed with Moultou that it would be wiser to conceal from her the day of his departure. When Mme. Necker learnt the truth she wrote to Moultou, and poured out all the passion of her heart:—

I will not try to describe to you my condition when, after having asked several times why you did not come, M. Necker at last told me that you had gone away. I went out immediately and gave way to all the bitterness of my grief. The blackest thoughts came before my mind, and torrents of tears could not lessen the weight that was suffocating me. It is quite true then, my dear friend, that I have seen you again after that long death that lukewarm-hearted people call absence. I have seen you but to lose you again. Where are you? Into what heart can I lay the thoughts that now distract me? My society has no longer any charm for me since it has lost its brightest ornament. I am now, dear friend, again alone in the desert which you had filled with your presence. If anything can lessen for me the awfulness of your departure, it is that I know you will be surrounded by a family which adores you, to know that you are in the arms of a woman who, by her character, by her understanding, by her

manner, and by a thousand virtues, is worthy of you, and above all by that loving sensitiveness which I have never known but in her. You wrote to me a letter that was just like your own self; I thought I was listening to you. But the illusion was a short one. They let you go away. Your return can only be a vague hope, for who can predict what may happen with such an interval of time and of space between us? But whether we are together or separated one from the other, recollect that never was kinder, more tender, and more painful homage paid than is now shown to all the qualities which distinguish you, and which both M. Necker and I praise so highly. He feels and thinks just as I have written, and I do not believe there is a man in the world who is fonder of you.

When M. Necker bought Coppet, in 1783, and after he had been accustomed to live there for some weeks consecutively, it was a source of great pleasure to Mme. Necker that she was near to the banks of the Lake of Geneva, and near to those friends among whom she had passed her younger days. But the pleasure was not destined to last very long. Moultou, who was only a few years older than herself, died in 1788 of an acute malady, and we may imagine what a cause of grief this was to Mme. Necker. She wrote to Moultou's son: "The condition of my own heart gives me very great pain when I think what must be your own grief. You told me that he was not in danger, and then I was easy; but death has now made its way into my heart when it was not expected." When death has made its way into a heart, following Mme.

Necker's strong expression, the void that it creates can only be filled by recollections of the beloved, and those people whom he had loved himself are the strongest and the most sympathetic. During the few years that Mme. Necker survived Moultou, the friendship which she had felt for him was afterwards given to his wife, to his son, and to his daughters; and she could in all truth write to Mme. Moultou that everything drew them together, "esteem, gratitude, recollection, and every loving and melancholy thought," — those thoughts which become, after our strength has begun to fail us, the law and the bitter sweetness of the second portion of our lives.

CHAPTER XII.

BUFFON—HIS CORRESPONDENCE WITH MADAME NECKER —HIS LAST DAYS.

THE close friendship between Mme. Necker and Buffon[1] is not one of the least curious features in the life of that illustrious man, as to whom the world has been pleased, on the faith of hostile evidence too readily believed, to credit with a reputation for hard-ness and coldness, until the publication of his corre-spondence, undertaken by his great-grandnephew, M. Nadault de Buffon,[2] made clear to us the truth on many points that before were misunderstood. When Buffon first knew Mme. Necker he was sixty-seven years old. Five years previously he had lost his wife, a woman much younger than himself, with whom he fell violently in love as he saw her when she was only eighteen in the parlour of the Ursuline convent

1 Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, was born at Montbard in 1707 ; he died in 1788.

2 *Correspondance inédite de Buffon*, published by his great-grand-nephew, M. Nadault de Buffon, Paris, 2 vols. 8vo.

at Montbard. She had repaid him for his affection by her tenderness, her fidelity, and her softness of manners.[1] "This death," he said, "has left an incurable wound in my heart." His son used to travel about under his orders until he obtained in the regiment of the Guards the rank of brevet-officer, and he was therefore compelled to spend the greater part of his time, separated from his father, in garrisons situated a long way from home.[2] Buffon lived a solitary existence at Montbard, laborious and cut off from all pleasures—at least, all lively pleasures—and the majestic regularity of his life, which has been so unfortunately taken in vain, perhaps assisted him in stifling the desires of an ardent nature. In his athletic body there was a warm and sensitive heart, and this heart held back affections which demanded that they should make themselves seen. It may be that during the few hours of repose he allowed himself every afternoon, as he walked up and down with

[1] The Comtesse de Buffon, before her marriage, was Marie Françoise de Saint-Belin. She was married in 1752; she died in 1769, when she was thirty-seven years old.

[2] Georges Louis Marie Leclerc, Chevalier de Buffon, was born in 1764; he became at first an officer in the French Guards, and afterwards a supernumerary captain in a Chartres regiment. He married Marguerite Françoise de Cepoy, and was separated from her when he had obtained proof that she had become the mistress of the Duke of Orleans. He died on the scaffold in 1794.

most regular step in the shade of the avenues, or in the sun upon the terraces which he had himself adorned, the painting of wonderful objects and the pursuit of the secrets of nature was not altogether occupying his thoughts; and it may be, that the noble delights of genius well pleased with its own work, did not let him forget the sad hours of a life deprived of those sweet and austere duties which possess for most men the interest, the charm, and the law of their lives. For five years Buffon had lived in this solitary manner, until he met Mme. Necker during one of those visits which he was obliged to make to Paris in virtue of his appointment as Intendant of the King's Gardens. It was Mme. de Marchais who brought them together. "I confess to you," Mme. Necker had written to her, "that I have the greatest curiosity to know M. de Buffon, and I should be very glad to be indebted to you for this pleasure, as also for many others." Mme. de Marchais had become acquainted with Buffon probably through her friend M. d'Angeviller, who, as the reader will recollect, was the director of the gardens and royal buildings. Though M. d'Angeviller had acted against Buffon's interests, by soliciting for himself the reversion of his office to the detriment of his son, yet Buffon had not broken off intercourse between them. Mme. de Marchais therefore invited them all to

supper, and from this meeting sprang a friendship which lasted for fourteen years, and which threw a last ray of light upon Buffon's old age, and at the same time afforded to Mme. Necker all that was flattering to a woman in the enthusiastic homage of a great genius. The first time he saw her Buffon was fascinated, and his letters, more than eighty in number, show his respectful and strong admiration, which seemed to grow stronger with the advance of years.

It has been remarked of Buffon's letters to Mme. Necker—some of which have been already published by M. Nadault de Buffon—that they are free from all ridiculous sentiment on the part of the writer. Looking at the matter from a one-sided point of view, though that side would not be the one most favourable, we might be inclined to smile in reading these letters, always emphatic in tone, in which Buffon calls Mme. Necker, his noble, his great, his sublime, and his first friend, and in which he exhausts—to express his own enthusiasm—all the series of metaphors which he can draw from the three kingdoms of nature. But if we can pass over or ignore this superficial impression, it is impossible not to be touched when we see a man like Buffon pour forth expressions of tenderness and gratitude upon a woman thirty years younger than himself, and in all humility compare the moral nature of

Mme. Necker with his own, and in his intercourse with her forget the distance which his fine genius, of which he was so proud, placed between them. I will choose from among those letters of Buffon to Mme. Necker which have not yet been published, some in which his feelings are expressed with the greatest warmth; and I hope the reader will not fail to be moved by the depth and the vivacity of the affection which shows itself under a rather solemn disguise.

MONTBARD, 23*rd July*, 1779.

MY MOST WORTHY FRIEND,

I took my leave with much regret. A tear came into my eye as I left you both, and this feeling of melancholy has since often come back to me, and has never yet quite died away; for I shall be devoted to you both until the last day of my life. I glory in it, and place my happiness in that thought. I could have, and perhaps ought to have, written to you, but I do not think very highly of sentiment put into narrative; and often those who feel the least are the most abundantly supplied with words. I will put it to you; do you believe, my guardian angel (for you have often corrected me), that sentiment can be shown except by actions. A bit of paper, it seems to me, cannot receive those impressions which are engraven at the bottom of the heart; we can only mark upon it the workings of the mind, not the sensations of the soul. I feel this in trying to describe to you my innermost thoughts; and you, my beautiful and noble friend, you who are my guide and my model in sentiment, have you ever been able to show otherwise than by great actions the sublime flights of that divine affection which is at the bottom of your virtues, and which, by your benevolence, is strewn over all humanity at large? And does not your

friendship show itself by what you actually do? Have you ever told me all that you have done for me? But cannot I in return do anything for you? I may remember all your good actions, your marks of kindness, your particular attentions. I do not find any way to acquit myself but in your own heart, to which I would willing join my own, my dearest friend.

Although Mme. Necker was scrupulous in answering all Buffon's letters, he nevertheless used some discretion in soliciting from her too frequently the marks of her affection. But after he had been silent for some few months the restraint became painful to him, and he took up his pen and wrote as follows:—

MONTBARD, *9th February*, 1781.

MY NOBLE FRIEND,

You, whose days may be counted by your acts of kindness, you whom I love and esteem infinitely more than my own self, grant to me a few of those moments which give me all my happiness. After two months of silence, my heart is longing for some effusion. Tender friendship, like love, wishes sometimes to make itself felt. Your letter of the 14th of December is ever before me; I still regard it with pleasure. And yet I ask for another which will be sufficient to make me happy until I return. Discretion becomes cruel when it is too long exacted; and yet it is from feelings of discretion that I write to you at such long intervals, or only when your goodness gives me occasion to do so. I have received to-day a letter from M. d'Angeviller which touches me, because I see for how very much I am indebted to your friendship. Allow me to send you a copy of it, because I think I may subscribe to everything that it contains, and also because I like to show to a high-minded soul the sentiments of a grateful heart. . . .

Pray accept my homage with that of my friend. All my tenderness and all my devotion has long since been due to you, and also for ever acquired by you, my most illustrious friend.

Sometimes the warm sentiments which Buffon felt for Mme. Necker made him indulge in dissertations of a somewhat delicate nature, and he excuses himself for writing with the same pen as that with which he wrote his *Histoire Naturelle.*

18*th July*, 1781.

I have too long revelled in your charming letter, my dearest friend, to put off any longer expressing to you the delights of my heart. I have never been tired of reading it, and re-reading it. High thoughts and profound sentiments may be seen there in every line, and they are expressed in such a noble and touching manner that not only did I become fully imbued with them, but I became warmed and exalted to such an extent that I conceived a higher idea of the nature of friendship. Ah, God! it is not a sentiment without fire; it is rather a warming of the soul, an emotion, a movement sweeter and also quite as strong as that of any other passion. It is enjoyment without violence, a happiness more than a pleasure. It is a communication of existence more pure, and yet more real than the sentiment of love. The union of souls is a penetration, that of bodies is only a contact. (Pardon me, my dear friend, these physical expressions; I am following my old profession of necromancer. I am writing to you with the same pen, and in the same style, as I write my *Histoire Naturelle.* You will excuse therefore the faults of writing and the liberties of expression in favour of my peculiar position.) But for the close union of souls, is it not necessary that they be both upon the same level, and can I flatter myself that mine will ever raise itself as high as yours? I think

so sometimes because I wish it, because you are my model, because I love and respect you more than I have ever loved any one. I should persuade myself of this all the more easily if I saw you overlook, as I do, the more important affairs in the difficult circumstances of our life. But, my great friend, how far are you not above me, above every one else, in the calm attitude which I have seen you preserve in the hours of the greatest trouble. Your letter which I have just received will always appear to me to be a divine monument of the greatest strength of soul.[1] Continue to show to our great man this same tranquillity, for that will make him happy. He will care little, or rather will not care at all for an increase of fortune, for his name is everywhere made glorious. He may still quietly add to his fame by putting his ideas and his views into writing; and you should instil into his great heart that he owes this benefit to posterity. But, my generous friend, as my thoughts grow warmer, my eyes get more tired and I cannot continue to write. I will therefore conclude, but shall always continue to adore you.

Buffon's keen sensibility for the acute nervous pains to which Mme. Necker was subject drew from him such strong marks of sympathy, that she would probably have checked his impassioned language had it come from any one but an old man of seventy-four years of age. He again writes to her:—

Since I received your letter of the 20th of August, my very dear and kindest friend, my happiness has gone from me. I could make no other answer than moan over the fearful pain that you have suffered; my thoughts are overcome and my heart is torn in pieces. A feeling as of being stunned came upon me

[1] M. Necker had just left the Ministry.

after the first fit of violence ; I feared (and, alas ! only too truly) that you would have a return of that cruel nervous pain ; and though your last letter somewhat reassured me, my mind and my heart are still always trembling for you. I wished to fly towards you, and indeed I should have been with you on the 12th of September, if heaven and earth had not barred my way. I am disconsolate at this excess of delay and this enforced absence. I tell you again, dear friend whom I adore, that I would wish to be near you ; and I would wish it also for this reason. I am sorry to hear you say that you *abandon to the fleetness or to the inconstancy of time, your friendships, your tastes, and your inclinations.* Oh ! my noble, too virtuous, and too courageous friend, *the deep affections* that you *are sure to steal from time*, are in fact the foundation of our welfare ; the tastes and the inclinations are the revenue. Happiness consists in losing nothing of that which we have ever once enjoyed. And who is there in all the world who deserves more fully than you to be perfectly happy ? Who more than you has the right to receive the gratitude of all right-minded persons ? Who would not build altars to you if every one knew you as I do ? Too much affection has here deceived me, for you have an altar in the heart of every honest creature ; and I, more than any one, ardently desire to see you enjoying peacefully and in good health everything that your high virtue has acquired for you. I have also a wish touching your person. I could not see that thinness, the loss of that snow-white plumpness without crying with grief. It is not only your soul that I love. You will be generous enough to forgive me this avowal ; I have as my guarantee the vows that you have been kind enough to make for the preservation of my own poor body.

MONTBARD, 1*st October*, 1781.

After having again read and kissed your letter, I take up my pen once more to say that as you have too much virtue you have also too much wit. How many ingenious images, and what a charming finish do I see in your last letter ? What a

varnish of beauty have you not laid over disagreeable matters, what a foundation of goodness! How ought I to love you, and also how much I do love you! Every day I see you more pleasing, and every day equally bright and attractive. All my life is devoted to you. I can never acquit myself of all that I owe to the affection of my divine friend. I venture to embrace her, even though it be under protest.

Mme. Necker, as we may imagine, was not insensible to the sentiments expressed by Buffon. She always had a charm for everything that carried with it a certain literary brilliancy. But what were the homages of a Marmontel, of a Grimm, of a Diderot, beside those of a man with whom Voltaire was willing, not ungracefully, to divide the honours of "The Temple of Memory," according to Lebrun's well-known line?—

Partage avec Buffon le temple de Mémoire.

The worship that Buffon openly showed to Mme. Necker, gave also to her a share of this glory:—

O! de Buffon illustre et digne amie,
Vous dont il m'a vanté l'âme et les agrémens,

as the same Lebrun[1] said to her (for he was the sort of poet most suitable to them both), and she must have

[1] Ponce Denis Écouchard Lebrun, sometimes called Pindar Lebrun, to distinguish him from Pierre Lebrun, was born in Paris in 1727, and died in 1807. His odes are now less highly thought of than his epigrams. Sainte-Beuve has an article on Lebrun in his *Causeries du Lundi*, vol. v.

been singularly happy to see their two names so associated together. She gave to Buffon a considerable place in her thoughts, and also in the occupations of her life. We very constantly see this illustrious name in the five volumes of *Pensées et Mélanges*, which, after Mme. Necker's death, were extracted from her daily journal. We perceive, therefore, that Buffon was very constantly in her thoughts, and that he was in her opinion the highest example of humanity. "M. de Buffon," she said, "is inimitable in everything, and yet he ought always to be taken as a model." The slightest opinions expressed by Buffon, his literary judgments upon his contemporaries and his rivals, his thoughts upon style and upon composition, some of which appeared to her to be singularly just and profound, were collected by her with most religious care. And upon his side, Buffon, when he saw that she was so attentive to his glory, did not conceal from her the high opinion that he had of himself. When to indemnify Buffon for the affront he had received for disposing of the reversion of his office, the king granted that a statue should be erected to him in the Royal Gardens during his own lifetime, it became a question as to the inscription most suitable to be placed upon the pedestal of the work of Pajou. The words *Naturam amplectitur omnem*, as first suggested, gave rise to the unfavourable criticism: "Qui trop embrasse

mal étreint;" and then Lebrun proposed the following verses:—

> Buffon vit dans ce marbre. A ces traits pleins de feu,
> Vois-je de la nature, ou le peintre, ou le dieu?

But it was afterwards decided that a Latin inscription would be preferable, and the day after the terms of this epigraph had been discussed in Mme. Necker's *salon*, Buffon himself essayed to compose his own inscription. He wrote to Mme. Necker:—

You exalted my self-love so very highly yesterday evening my noble friend, that during the night I dreamt of two verses for the portrait:

> Buffoni os insigne videns mirabere. Quid si
> Virtutes, nec non præcordia candida noris?

This is not very good; but I should prefer this Latin to the phrase taken from my own works. Farewell, adorable friend, for the last four and twenty hours I have not ceased to think of you.

After turning these lines over in his mind he perceived that they were not faultless, and a few days later he wrote again to Mme. Necker:—

THE ROYAL GARDENS, 11*th February.*

Not satisfied with the last Latin verses that I sent to my noble friend, I have dreamt of four others which appear to me to be less bad. I submit them to her judgment, which is a thousand times more delicate and more sure than my own:—

Ingenio sublimi, menteque diviniore
Intima Naturæ victæ penetralia scrutans
Buffonus verbo terram et cœlos patefecit,
Felix! nam potuit rerum dignoscere causas.

We may gather that Mme. Necker had not a very high opinion of the verses of her illustrious friend (although he, the very next day, with the aid of a dictionary, set to work to correct the false quantities); for in place of this epigraph she suggested to him an inscription which she had composed herself, and he replied to her immediately :—

My noble friend, that which you have found so easily is worth more than the effort of my imagination, and as I wish to praise eloquence and genius we must have your epitaph in place of mine :

Cedite, Romani scriptores, cedite, Graii[1]
Nostro Buffonio cui mens divinia atque os
Magna sonaturum . . . .

and then stop there. I do not object to omit my two last verses ; I wished in them to express my devotion for you. The heart ought to be able to talk any language, but the Latin would not obey me ; and these feelings are so strong that it would be impossible for me to translate them into French.

It was not only in the interest of his own glory that Buffon tried to show his skill—somewhat clumsily as we may see—in the art of Latin verses ; the desire to

[1] This first verse is taken from Propertius, who had written it before the publication of the Æneid.

celebrate in a resplendent style the graces and the virtues of his incomparable friend was equally strong within him. Mme. Necker had had her portrait painted in miniature upon a small enamelled box in order to give it to Buffon, and Buffon had caused to be engraved round the portrait the following lines :—

> Angelica facie et formoso corpore Necker
> Mentis et ingenii virtutes exhibit omnes.

But before very long this measure of praise did not seem to him to be sufficient, and one morning he wrote to Mme. Necker from the Royal Gardens :—

11th April, 1786.

Monday, five o'clock in the morning. A night calmer than the preceding ones, and during which I dreamt these verses, that I should like to add to the two first which are round the portrait of my adorable friend.

> Fulget enim Necker, miseris auxilia et opes
> Suppeditans, fulget tradens hospitia sana
> Ægrotis, nec non captivis ostia pandens.

Mme. Necker, who then was unwell, wrote to him thanking him for the verses, and as she announced to him her intention of going to see him, Buffon immediately answered her :—

The Royal Gardens, *13th April*, 1786.

The night was a very good one, and the cold has much diminished. I should have been very much pleased if my adorable friend had told me a word as to her health. I beg that she will

not take the trouble to come. My verses do not deserve a welcome. I have just copied them, and I have altered the last one. I have also made four verses in French. Good or bad, here they are :—

> Ce visage angélique avec un beau corsage,
> Annoncent de Necker l'âme et le génie.
> De la divinité vive et fidèle image,
> Tu sus aux malheureux rendre ou donner la vie.

Buffon, as we know, was not very fond of poetry. According to him (and perhaps the judgment is deeper than we may be inclined to think) the highest praise that one could give of a piece of verse, was to say : "it is as fine as good prose." He was too keen a critic of good prose to deceive himself as to the merit of his own verses ; and in those that I have quoted we see only an amusing instance of his pride, his affection, and of his good nature.

During those hours that Buffon and Mme. Necker used to spend talking together, either as they walked up and down in the long avenue of trees in the Royal Gardens, or as they were sitting on a summer's evening upon the terrace at Saint Ouen, there was a subject which the high and thoughtful nature of both minds would often bring prominently forward, and upon which they would often converse, each understanding very little of what the other said. More than one discussion arose as to what were Buffon's real religious

opinions. We know that he had made up his mind not to expose himself to censure from the Sorbonne, and that after having published, in 1750, his theory upon the earth, when he was cautioned by the faculty of theology, he immediately wrote a reply in which he expressly declared that "he had no intention of contradicting the text of Scripture, and that he fully believed everything that was said therein touching the creation of the world, both as to the days mentioned and as to the facts given." We need not attach too much importance to the phrase of which Hérault de Séchelles formally accused him: "I have always named the Creator, but we may equally well suppress this word and put in its place, 'the power of nature';" but, at the same time we cannot deny that if the words "God," "the creator of the world," "the author of things," fall frequently from his pen, these words seem to have for him no other meaning than a conventional form of language. When, with that *breadth of mind*, of which he was justly proud, he contemplated the various revolutions that had taken place in the world—and in spite of his errors we cannot forget his sagacity;—when,—(according to a bold metaphor) to the question which God asked of Job, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" he seems to answer, "I was there;"—it would seem also, in spite of the

proud reserve which he showed in his language, that Buffon did not feel that there must necessarily have been an intelligent and guiding power, and that to explain these successive revolutions it was sufficient for him to recall the force of nature of which he used to speak with that warm and convincing eloquence. "It is," he would say, "a real power; it is immense, it embraces everything, it gives life to everything. . . . . It is at the same time the cause and the effect, the manner and the substance, the design and the work; . . . it is a workman incessantly active, who can use every method, and who, working after his own manner, always on the same basis, instead of exhausting it renders it inexhaustible; time, space, and matter are its means, the universe its object, the movement and life itself its aim and its end." In a word, he lacked that which Sainte-Beuve—the Sainte-Beuve of 1854—in the discriminating study devoted to him, so happily called "the ray of light, that humble desire which calls for blessing from above upon his daily work, and which makes him ask for his daily bread." On the other hand we know, and the documents published by M. Nadault de Buffon have again confirmed the testimony, that Buffon always conformed to the outward practices of public worship; and that, at the moment of his death, in the fulness of his intellect,

and without pressure of any kind, he not only accepted, but he earnestly wished for, succour from the Church. There is something exceedingly distasteful in the thought that a man of such a high nature should have been, as it were, acting a comedy all his life, and that the religious fervour which he professed at his last hour should only have been a calculation on his part assumed to procure for him the right of burial.

Is this not one of those problems into which it does not concern us to inquire? What right have we to penetrate into the depths of a conscience—perhaps a conscience that has felt and doubted—to decide for ourselves how far the mind has resisted or how far the will has been weak? But the temptation is invincible which in these times of doubt leads us to examine great minds and learn what they thought of those terrible problems, which are at the bottom of all our quarrellings. I have not been able to prevent myself from trying to find out whether, in this intimate correspondence, the real sentiments of Buffon did not occasionally show themselves. These deep questions seem to have been mooted by Buffon and Mme. Necker during the first year of their acquaintance.[1] "I protest to you, madam, that I should esteem myself more highly if I could believe

[1] The letter from which I extract the following fragment has already been published by M. Nadault de Buffon.

in everything as firmly as both you and M. Necker do; but the first of all religions is that every one should have his own, and the greatest of all happiness is to think one's own religion the best. The pleasure that I received from our conversations was not lessened by the fact that we did not agree together, and you will allow, madam, by my desire to seek every opportunity of being with you, that I was sincere in the sentiments that I professed for you." The recollection of these discussions was probably present to Buffon's mind when a few months afterwards he wrote the following lines:—

MONTBARD IN BURGUNDY, 13*th July*, 1774.

M. de Buffon has the honour of sending to Madame Necker a short paper which he has not published, and which he probably never will publish, but which he would submit to her judgment, asking at the same time that she may be indulgent and frank towards him. He takes the opportunity of offering to her his respectful homage, and all the sentiments of his great esteem.

The short paper that Buffon sent to Mme. Necker was a little work in which he endeavoured to reconcile the narrative given in the Book of Genesis with his own theory as to the formation of our globe. These few pages he afterwards printed in his *Époques de la Nature.* Mme. Necker was therefore perfectly aware of his attempt at explanation, as to which it would seem that the idea first suggested itself to

Buffon by the desire of calming the scruples felt by his noble friend in admiring the boldness of his own hypothesis. If such was his object he was perfectly successful, for this reconciliation, which now appears to us to be only half satisfactory, completely reassured Mme. Necker. She wrote to him :—

I shall treasure up the inestimable present of which you think that I am worthy. It is a model of that feeling of respect which one ought to have for received ideas when they are useful to us. I see how far a man can sacrifice his pride and the opinionativeness of genius in obliging him to use his strength against his own opinions when they may prove dangerous ; and I shall never feel that I am humbling myself in making before you the confessions of an honest soul which seeks for aid from heaven, as one looks for a kindly feeling in the heart of one's friend.

But this concession that Buffon made to the received opinions did not suffice to put an end to all controversy between him and Mme. Necker. I find the proof of this in a letter, written some years later, in which he alludes to his dissensions from her upon a much graver matter than the successive evolutions of the globe—on the existence and future life of the soul. He, who, after St. Paul, and after Racine, has written such a fine page on the *homo duplex*, the double man, which we all feel to be within us, does not in this letter appear to be fully persuaded that these two men start from a different principle, and must therefore each count upon a future

different from the other. I will give this letter in its entirety, for it is curious in two ways. We see here how Buffon has expressed himself in his doubts upon this the most important point in every philosophical belief, and we also perceive a tenderness of heart, which as he gets older seemed to grow gradually stronger within him:—

I shall not see you then until I return to Paris. Ah! my adorable friend, this long absence is very hard for me to bear. I was in full expectation that in your journey from Lyons to Paris you would not choose any other route than that by Montbard, and it is small consolation to me to think that you had also reckoned upon coming this way, but that it was not in your power to do so. I adore you so truly that I feel sure my affection is pleasing to you. I shall love you all my life, and even in the other life, and through all eternity, if, as I hope, your opinion is better than mine. With what nice tact, with what delicacy you gave me this lesson in philosophy in your last letter! In its four pages there was more sublime morality than in a whole volume. Every line of it is an axiom, and the graceful sentiment is always placed before the deep thought. Yes, divine creature, you are all mind and all soul. The weaker your body is, the stronger is your head. In you the two substances are distinct, but in me they are united. I feel the faculties of mind to diminish with those of the body, and there is the foundation of the difference in our opinions. Tenderness of heart is the only thing which appears to grow stronger in me instead of diminishing. For I love you all the more in proportion as I get weaker, or as my sufferings increase; but I cannot tell you so with the same energy. My poor body, overcome with age, enfeebled by habitual incommodity, is wearing itself away in journeys rendered obligatory on account of lawsuits and troublesome business,

but more especially because of the regrets caused by such a long absence, and my uneasiness as to your health, which is more precious to me than my own. Your kind friendship is all the happiness of my life, and I am not happy unless you are well and when I do not see you. How much do I not owe to you, without mentioning the gratitude for pecuniary help, which I should have accepted if I had been in need of it; but I realised and invested in land the money necessary for the dowry of my daughter-in-law. I have just sold the furniture in the house upon this property; it was useless to me, and I have got from it 11,000 livres. I have therefore more money than I want for the life of an anchorite, such as I lead here. That was a nice present made by Prince Henry,—china and gold spoons. You will read and return to me his letter, which is kind and well written. Adieu, my adorable friend; excuse my very bad handwriting.[1]

This letter is undated, but we know from the allusion to the china tea-service that was sent to Buffon by Prince Henry of Prussia the year following his journey into France, that it was written in the year 1785; and also from the handwriting, and the allusion made to his increasing infirmities, it may be seen plainly enough that it must have been written during the latter years of his life. Buffon was much troubled with stone, and this painful malady made his periodical journey from Montbard to Paris more and more distressing every year. To lessen the suffering caused by the shaking on the

[1] Buffon rarely wrote himself; he ordinarily employed a secretary. But nearly all his letters which I have given were written by himself, no doubt because of their intimate character.

journey, Mme. Necker had caused to be made and sent to him from Paris a carriage constructed in such a way as to lessen the pain felt by the frequent jolting. It was in this carriage that Buffon made his last journey in the early part of the year 1788. His increasing infirmities left him no doubt that his end was now fast approaching. On one warm afternoon in the month of April he wished to take a last melancholy walk round the Royal Gardens, upon which he had bestowed so much of his labour. Enveloped in fur, and leaning upon the arms of two lacqueys, he went out to look at the long avenue of trees where he had so often previously walked up and down in company with Mme. Necker; and when he went in he lay down, never to rise from his bed again. As he perceived his last days were approaching, he wished that Mme. Necker's portrait, mounted in a case, which she had given to him, should be put upon the table near his bed, and he never ceased to look at the picture of the woman who had become so dear to him. At this time, too, M. Necker's book, *L'Importance des Opinions Religieuses,* was being much talked about in Paris. Buffon had this read aloud to him, and he exerted himself to dictate to his son a letter, in which he charged Mme. Necker to convey to her husband the transports of admiration that the book had given him. Young Buffon also added: "I have given the pen to

papa, he has had strength enough to add his name. He called me after dinner and dictated to me without hesitating and without wavering. It is now sixteen days that he has been ill, and you yourself saw yesterday evening what his condition then was. My tears are falling so fast that I cannot continue to write more." And at the bottom of this letter may be seen traced in trembling but in distinct characters the illustrious name of Buffon.

When Mme. Necker learnt that Buffon's state was hopeless, her affection for him did not allow her to falter. She left her own house and took up her abode in the Royal Gardens. "What kindness this is!" Buffon said to her as he saw her come into his room. "You have come to see me die. What a spectacle for a kind and sensitive heart!" She placed herself by the side of his bed, and never left him. Seated there she overcame every thought that was repugnant to a weak and nervous nature, and for five days during his great agony of pain she was always by his side. When excessive suffering caused a cold perspiration to rise over all the body of the old man, Mme. Necker wiped his forehead, and rendered to him those services which a daughter would show to her father. In the intervals of repose between his fearful spasms, she drew near to his bedside that she

might do something for him, and Buffon took her by the hands and exclaimed: "You are still a charmer to me when every other charm has gone from me." Of this agony Mme. Necker has left a simple, sober, and pathetic narrative, as is the case with everything deeply felt.[1] In this narrative, written from day to day, we see what has the foremost place in her thoughts: she is anxious as to the sentiments that Buffon will express in the last moments before his death. She passes very lightly over all the expressions of gratitude which he abundantly gave to her; but she denotes the smallest details, showing clearly that he was speaking and acting in full possession of his powers. It must have been a great joy to her when she heard him in a strong and clear voice pronounce these words: "I declare publicly that I die in the religion in which I was born, and publicly attest that I believe in Jesus Christ who came down from heaven on to the earth for the salvation of men; I pray that He will watch over me and protect me, and I declare publicly that I believe in his protection." She then gives proofs of the impatience with which Buffon, always fearing that he was just about to die in a convulsion of pain, asked that the Sacraments should be administered

[1] This narrative may be found in the second volume of the publication of M. Nadault de Buffon.

to him. Then, after relating the fervour with which he received them, she adds: "This terrible spasm of death is partly calmed, but he still has excessive suffocation. The hard breathing was frequent and troublesome, then the pulse got gradually lower, his mouth remained open, his hands and feet grew cold. Several times he pressed the hand of Mlle. Blesseau"[1] (and we may be certain that of Mme. Necker also). "His breathing became almost insensible, and at forty minutes past midnight he died."

Some days had to pass before Mme. Necker could shake off the grief which these sad scenes had impressed upon her mind; and she went to Saint Ouen that she might there be quiet and at rest. The recollection of the agony suffered long remained in her thoughts; and some months after Buffon's death she wrote in her journal: "In the last days of his life M. de Buffon said some things that were very touching; they seemed to come from the bottom of the grave. The spectacle of his sufferings will ever remain in my heart and be present to my thoughts. He showed me that all great talents were as nothing; that man was nothing; that God is everything, and that to Him we must look for a refuge against our own thoughts."

[1] Mlle. Blesseau for many years past had been Buffon's housekeeper.

Mme. Necker found in Buffon's will the concise but affectionate expression of the love which he felt for her. Almost at the commencement of this will, and before the legacies left by him to his brother and sister, Buffon says: "I beg my most worthy and dearest friend, Mme. Necker, to accept the legacy which I take the liberty of offering to her, the china breakfast-service which was given to me by Prince Henry of Prussia. The box, in which she was kind enough to give me her portrait, will also be restored to Mme. Necker." This china breakfast-service, upon which may be seen painted the whole History of the Swan, recalled a thought that was ever dear to Buffon. Once when she was at Montbard Mme. Necker took up a volume of Buffon's great work, and began to read aloud the Story of the Swan, which is one of the most charming and the most poetical passages.[1] Buffon was delighted to hear the charm of his prose heightened by a voice of which he was fond, and by the legacy which he begged his most worthy and dearest friend to accept he wished to engrave the recollection of this circumstance in her heart.[2] His most worthy and dearest

[1] It would appear that the History of the Swan was in a great part the work of the abbé Bexon. But Buffon always revised the manuscripts of those who worked with him, and, in spite of what may have been said, added to their work the imprint of his own genius.

[2] In her will Mme. Necker charged her husband to give back this china breakfast-service to Buffon's son. But as he had perished upon

friend! These few words, in which he expressed his veneration and his love, are, in fact, the true sentiments that Buffon felt for Mme. Necker. This attraction shown by the genius of a man for the charms of a good woman is real enough to deserve our respect, and a little magniloquence in his language need not make us forget all that was touching and noble in their friendship.

the scaffold before Mme. Necker's death, the bequest could not be executed. The china breakfast-service is still preserved at Coppet, and so is the box containing Mme. Necker's portrait.

CHAPTER XIII.

THOMAS.

THERE are names unfortunate in literature—names which fasten themselves in our minds, or which have the privilege to make us smile when they are mentioned, and also to cause us a certain feeling of boredom. Thomas is one of these men, the virtuous Thomas, as his contemporaries used to call him, not without some raillery; and I should perhaps hesitate to notice the place he occupied in the circle of Mme. Necker's friends if I did not think that his absence would be too strongly marked. Thomas was a victim of one unkind word spoken of him by Voltaire, who called him the *Galithomas.* He was thought little of by the encyclopædists, who did not forgive him for taking no part in their own passions; and also, we must confess, the weight of his own seven octavo volumes have not greatly contributed to raise him in the world's estimation. If his fall was great, there may be perhaps some rashness in an attempt

made to try to bring him back into favour. Is it possible to interest a generation of readers who like to think that they have invented the art of criticism, in an author who has only written encomiums upon other authors; or how can we make the readers of *Rolla* enjoy the pleasures of *La Pétréïde?* But yet Thomas deserves to be studied as the highest type of a man who in his literary work has thoroughly shown all the feelings of a gentleman. He appears to be very small, and perhaps somewhat ridiculous, by the side of Grimm, Diderot, and even Marmontel; he was the contemporary of all these men, and he appeared to them to be gifted with no uncommon genius. They respected him though they made fun of him, and not one of them could dispute with him the place he held in Mme. Necker's heart.

Thomas[1] first became acquainted with Mme. Necker, who was a few years younger than he was, very shortly after her marriage. Until that time he passed poorly enough a life of constant hard work, and in return was often laughed at by his literary brethren for the severity with which he applied himself to his labour. "Brother Thomas," said Grimm, in his *Bans et Publications de l'Église philosophique,* "announces that he has composed an essay upon women, and that it will be a work of

[1] Antoine Léonard Thomas was born at Clermont Ferrand in 1732. He died at Oullins, near Lyons, in 1785.

importance. The Church esteems highly the purity of manners and the virtues of the brother, but she fears that he does not yet know women sufficiently well; she counsels him to make himself more intimately acquainted, if it be possible, with some of the heroines whom he would portray. She urges this recommendation for the benefit of his work." As a matter of fact, the only woman with whom Thomas had as yet become intimate was his mother, who lived with him. A stalwart woman from Auvergne, she devoted her life to the education of seventeen children, of whom our Thomas was one of the youngest; but she seldom wasted upon any one of them too much kindness, and her son said of her, that, "judging by her austere tastes and her Spartan manner, she might well have been the mother of Leonidas or of Phocion." A delicate health and an honourable poverty had not allowed him to mix in the society of men of letters, and his warm imagination, his proud and sensitive nature, made of him a man somewhat different to his fellow-creatures. He had lived almost a solitary life until the day when M. d'Angeviller, with whom he was intimately acquainted, introduced him to Mme. Necker in her own drawing-room. That day was a great event, and was the commencement of a revolution in Thomas's moral life and in his daily habits.

Mme. Necker was not a woman to fear the somewhat inflated form in which Thomas expressed his boundless admiration for her character, and he very shortly discovered in her an intelligent sympathy for the deep and hidden sides of his nature, which he himself had hitherto failed to understand. In return Thomas gave to her most assiduous worship, and this worship might perhaps have been expressed in too impassioned language if Mme. Necker had not immediately checked it, and if she had not made Thomas understand that he must confine the expression of his sentiments within a certain limit. "I will not tell you anything," he wrote to her at the commencement of their acquaintance, "as to the state of my feelings. Although you have declared that they may be tender but never strong, I know very well that when I am near you they will have difficulty in showing themselves to be obedient." But when she was well assured that Thomas, let the cost to him be what it might, had determined to speak with discretion, she fearlessly and openly showed to him the great pleasure she felt in his high and right-minded nature, and also how far their ideas were similar, though at the same time she had taken precautions that he should not run counter to any of her fancies or to any of her convictions. After a few years she wrote to him: "I shall always have need of your

friendship, but it is more specially soothing to my heart when it is broken down by the inutilities of life; it is in you that it will seek a refuge, it is to you that it will fly to seek fresh life, and recall those principles which the routine of received ideas ever endeavours to weaken. Your conversation is always for me as the awakening from a confused dream. I say to myself, 'That is good, honest, and true, and all the rest is but illusion and falsehood.'"

This friendship was expressed by both of them in a great number of letters; for although Thomas ordinarily resided in Paris he used often to go into the country that he might there have that rest which was necessary for him when he wished to work, or he sometimes went down into the south of France. In those few letters of his which I will give, I think that most readers will be surprised to find that he there lays aside almost altogether the oratorical pompousness shown in his published works; but these letters are perhaps among the latest that he has written. This philosopher, this rhetorician, is in fact, when we see him in his intimate life, a man given to melancholy, and ill at ease with himself. He is subject to the same fits of enthusiasm as was Rousseau upon nature, upon solitude, and upon life, its sorrows and its mistakes; we find in him accents that seem to foretell the coming

of Werther. This rich epoch, the latter years of the eighteenth century, has produced other men besides reckless philosophers and fashionable libertines—men who were enjoying themselves happily enough around the death-bed of a society against which they at any rate had no reason to complain, men who thought of little else than claiming for themselves all the pleasures of this life, and allowed themselves to be troubled by no cares as to the life beyond. This same epoch has also given us a few men who, perceiving the ruin that was hanging over their heads, did make an earnest endeavour to look into the darkness that lay before them, and who, believing that the end of all religion was near at hand, asked themselves, trembling, to what source of humanity they could henceforward turn for consolation and for hope. These men had the same presentiment as Buffon when he exclaimed, "I feel as if a great change was going to overtake us all, but I see no one able to guide it"; or again they had the same sentiment as Ducis,[1] Thomas's best friend, who said, "Our greatest happiness is only unhappiness comforted." They were in very fact our precursors and our

[1] Jean François Ducis, born at Versailles in 1733, died in 1813. His correspondence, which contains a large number of letters written to Thomas, has been recently published. As to Ducis, see Sainte-Beuve's *Nouveaux Lundis*, t. iv.

forefathers, for instead of running wild in all the apathy of the time they asked themselves uneasy questions as to which they could not well even guess an answer, and they felt pressing upon them the weight of those same problems which are now a cause of anxiety to ourselves. Whatever we may think of Thomas, he was one of the ancestors of Obermann and René, and some of his letters will show him in a light hitherto little known, and at the same time they will afford to us a study always interesting, that of watching the intimacy that existed between two noble-minded people. I will first give the following, which was written at the commencement of their acquaintance, and which Thomas wrote to Mme. Necker from Saint Germain en Laye, where he had hired a small house to spend the summer with his mother and sister:—

Saturday, Six o'Clock.

It is early, and you have certainly not yet risen. Perhaps a dream is now bringing before your mind some pleasant thoughts of your own that occurred to you last evening, or some pleasant thoughts that you gave to some one else. For my part I have passed a good night, and I awoke this morning thinking of you. I write to you sitting near to a small window that looks out upon my rustic garden; the rising sun sends me some of its rays. I see now before me some wall-fruit trees, and hope to get some fruit from them in the autumn; and I hear in the garden next to mine the noise of a spade being dug into the ground. Man is at labour and nature is awakening. This is another day upon which I will think of your friendship and my own happiness.

Yes, this friendship gives me and will continue to give a charm to my life. I find in it that which elevates the soul and also that which consoles it. Mine has become calmer and more tranquil since I have come into the country: but the first few days were terribly wearisome to me. When I came here I was troubled about matters that gave me much pain; and solitude, which soothes grief at last, is at first hard to bear. Removed from everything that can distract one's thoughts the soul then falls back upon itself, but reflection intervenes, and that which we call philosophy then comes to our aid. Far away from all those miseries of society, one then feels that they are miseries. Great objects efface smaller ones. In thinking of those friends that we have we console ourselves for not having others;—we forgive indifference, and even that false friendship a hundred times crueller than indifference itself. But why should I talk to you of all this? I have perhaps tired you; but friendship, and yours more especially, is indulgent. And also when I am talking to you I can tell better what you really are, judging from that which is wanting to others. A day has not passed here that I have not regretted you, or that I have not wished to see you and to talk with you. I have taken no walk that your presence would not have made brighter to me. I looked for you, but you were always four leagues away from me. Yes, I like to be near you, to breathe the same air as you do, to know your ideas, and to share your feelings. If I am wrong in this I shall not correct myself of it very easily. Tell me what you are doing. As regards myself, I write, I read, I walk, I ride on horseback; I often ride about in a large and handsome forest. These vast forests in my mind are one of the fine objects in nature. I find that they give rest to, and that they enlarge, the soul. One may talk in this way to you. Your imagination feels nature and your mind can realise it. Though I should be infinitely delighted to receive a letter from you, do not put yourself to any annoyance to write to me. Do I not know well enough that you have some friendship for me? Your silence would give me another proof

of it. No, my heart will only take an account of those who reckon everything and who feel nothing.

Accept the marks of an attachment which is equalled by my tender respect, and pray offer from me the same sentiments to M. Necker. They will be better received if presented to him by you.

SAINT GERMAIN, 21*st May*, 1768.

In reading of this rustic home that faces the rising sun, the well-provided wall-fruit trees, the gardener who is digging the ground, "the man at labour while nature is awakening," "the forests which give rest to and enlarge the soul,"—in all this are we not reminded of the pictures drawn by Rousseau and by Bernardin de Saint Pierre? In many of Thomas's letters we find the same features. But like all those who at this epoch had a love of nature and a fondness for solitude, like Rousseau and like Bernardin de Saint Pierre, Thomas also had his corner of morosity and of savagery. As we may imagine, he made a poor figure in Mme. Necker's drawing-room. Sometimes he would stand there silent, austere looking, showing by his attitude that what was being said did not meet with his approbation, or that the talkers were not people that he liked. And he writes to Mme. Necker to justify himself:—

Why should you steal from me the four pages in which you scolded me? Why should you tear them up, since you were

good enough to concern yourself about me? I may well say with Molière, "*Je veux qu'il me batte, moi.*" Blows from those that one loves are better, they say, than caresses from others. And what praise, what poor panegyrics from the whole world, would flatter me as much as any evil that you might say of me? This evil is a sign of interest, it would be friendship, it would be something coming from you. In friendship, as in love, a little storm is a hundred times better than forgetfulness. When you have nothing better to do, write to me to scold me. The subject is a good one, and you will find plenty of matter. Tell me of that uneasy sensibility which fears your indifference as the greatest misfortune, and for whom, in this way, fear, even of the most ridiculous kind, is still fear. Tell me how terribly wrong I was in not esteeming the world when I saw you; in becoming difficult as to people when I compared them with you; in not enjoying the wit of a great many clever women when I had been for some time talking with you. Reproach me for my folly in not being able to smile, and to amuse myself when I am in the presence of twenty persons who are all crowding round you, and preventing me from coming near you, for not being able to listen to them patiently when you cease talking, and for not endeavouring to please them when they bore me. Do not spare me, and try, if you can, to cure me of all my faults. At all events, persuade me that I must love you much less; for I can warn you that many of my faults come from that vice. Ah! when one is indifferent it is easy enough to be well pleased with every one. A man may then be calm, tranquil, and always coldly equal minded. He then has the happiness of comparing nothing and seeing nothing. Places, time, and people, all appear to him to be the same. The freshness of your lime-trees gives the same charm to M. d'Angeviller, to you yourself, or to a peasant of Saint Ouen, who may be walking in their shade. In their tranquil vegetation they do not change; that is how we should be. I have not yet come to this degree of perfection, but by dint of care, and after long years, I may perhaps be able to attain to it.

In the meanwhile allow me to take a pleasure in everything that interests you, in everything that concerns you, in everything that relates to your friendship, of which I feel honoured, and which gives me at least as much pleasure as it does also a feeling of pride.

Friday, 29th May, 1772.

As their intimacy increased, Thomas expresses more freely to Mme. Necker the warmth of his sentiments. " Your soul," he tells her, " is necessary to mine—without yours mine is wandering; it is never in its place and is never at rest but when it is beside you." And more openly he confides to her his sorrows, his mistakes, and the regret because the ambitions of his youth, now effaced, have left so small a mark " upon that cruel and fleeting scene which he calls life." Sometimes, as though he was aware that his reputation would only be ephemeral, he regrets that he had devoted himself to letters, that he had not looked for more happiness in this world, and that he did not allow his life to go along a " soft and insensible decline, which would have permitted him to gather on the way those tranquil pleasures to be procured by friendship." He then tries to imagine to himself what his life would have been if he had known Mme. Necker in another situation and in another country:—

I must tell you of a dream, or of a fanciful idea, that comes across my mind sometimes, and which I like to picture to

myself. If, in the days when you were in your own country, in a retired and solitary country house, between the kindest and best parents, when you were cultivating quietly, by study and by reflection, those talents which we now admire, and that elevated and sensitive mind—if by chance I had been travelling in those regions, and I had thus known you, it seems to me that from that moment your country would have become mine. I could not have left it. I should have remained in the happy desert in which nature had placed you; my heart would have moulded itself by the side of yours; my mind would every day have gained fresh light from your knowledge. I should have desired nothing, regretted nothing. An importunate crowd would never have come to snatch you away from me, and mix up its insipid commonplaces in the charm of our conversation. My happiness would have been to enjoy yours; and in this solitude, forgetting all the rest of the world, every day passed by your side would have appeared to me but as a moment. That is the romance of my life, but a romance which it has not been my good fortune to share. You will have been more happy; you will at least have had a more brilliant happiness. I hope that this happiness may not be too restless, and that it may continue. I hope it may not exact from you too much activity. Activity is good only so far as it exercises one's strength without exhausting it. For my own part, I, who have been born with strong passions and a weak body, who am easily tormented and fatigued, I am often obliged to resort to the uniformity of a calm life in the country. When I am face to face with nature I forget this Paris, which is so unlike it; but I cannot forget that which interests me, and that which I love. I call to mind all my old recollections until I have none left; then I enjoy my sorrows, as I cannot enjoy that which gives rise to them.

Thomas's imagination, naturally inclined to melancholy, did not always afford him dreams so agreeable as these. Like every nervous and sensitive nature, he

was at times overcome with fits of sadness, by discouragement, by dislike of his own ordinary occupations. He then suffered because of the barriers that the ordinary course of society placed between Mme. Necker and himself, and he would wonder that any man could remain near to her and desire to be occupied with other thoughts.

I am no longer at Saint Ouen, madam—that is, in a charming house in the middle of a fine park, upon a magnificent terrace, opposite to an arm of the river which surrounds a large island ; the whole offering a most charming picture. I no longer hear you ; I no longer see you in the middle of all that. I occupy a little country house, a little garden, and a little room ; I do very little, but I spend my time in thinking of you, and in dreaming of you. That alone makes this season of the year and this place joyful to me. I try in vain to work, to think, to bring back an ardour and an activity that I can no longer command. The Czar, poetry, works of imagination, all that interests me little. I have nearly the misfortune to outlive my tastes. I find myself to be without hope, without desires, condemned to a sort of nothingness. I do not know what can be the reason for all this, whether it is illness, fear, distaste, or idleness ; but these attacks often come upon me. I prefer a moment by your side to fifteen centuries of that posterity of which you so often talk to me, and which you make me so soon forget. I will go to you at the end of this week. I will go and find once more kindness and intellect, simplicity and acuteness, the spirit of observation with the indulgence of character, all the graces which delight, and all the virtues which elevate. Ah ! what are you doing in Paris ? You have wandered there, you are lost there. Your heart at each instant contradicts everything that surrounds you, and two or three isolated and scattered beings are worthy

of appreciating you and knowing you. If you push back the others they will not dare to approach you. Who has the courage to be humbled twenty times in the day? What! There is one for whom you live, for whom you breathe, and for whose wants you do not prove sufficient, but who wants also to have all the world round about him. If you were in a desert, and with another man, I should then wish to have the happiness of being all alone with you. I have already been in this situation, and it was one of the happiest moments of my life. I must forget it all, and come back and see you again in the crowd, in the world, at those dinners and at those suppers. I shall hear dissertations, stories, and idle talk, and then in those moments I shall be thinking of all that you do not say. Receive my most tender respects, and remember me occasionally amidst all the distractions with which your life is surrounded.

Mme. Necker, who by nature was also inclined to fits of sadness, and who keenly felt all the small annoyances of life, chose Thomas as her confidant, to whom she would relate her feelings of melancholy and depression of spirits. She wrote to him:—

Let my soul repose upon yours. When in the midst of all this involuntary, vexatious clinging to troubles of every kind, in the midst of this secret anxiety which arises in our thoughts, when one says to oneself, "Who am I? where am I going? where have I come from?" I can at least assure myself that I have upon this fickle world a sure resting-place in the bottom of your heart.

And Thomas answered her, endeavouring to recall her to herself, by the thought of how much happiness she gave to others round about her:—

It gave me much pain to see that you were unhappy, that your health afflicts you, and that you feel the troubles much more keenly than the pleasures of life. Ought you to think so, you who are surrounded by people who love you, you who are the cause of happiness to every one who knows you? Be fond of life, at least for the good that you do, and for all the unhappy ones to whom you give solace. Be fond of it for your dearest friends, and for those who would be as nothing if you were no longer in existence.

This failing common to them both to indulge in fits of unhappiness, often led them to talk upon graver matters; and also on this point Mme. Necker and her friend often were sympathetic. Thomas was not so firm as was Mme. Necker in his belief in the Christian faith, but he had, in common with her, that sort of sensitive deism which was so common with religious-minded people of the eighteenth century. God, the soul, death, eternity—these grave questions occurred frequently in their correspondence. Thomas's sombre imagination found pleasure in these studies, and he found an echo to his ideas in the mind of Mme. Necker. And touching Mme. Geoffrin's death, he wrote to her:—"Here, then, is the end of everything! It is to arrive at this point that we must travel, often painfully enough, over the passions, the weaknesses, and the follies of men!" But he added, immediately, "Happily we meet sometimes on the journey soft and affectionate hearts who charm for

us the wearisomeness of the voyage. When we love any one we are not to be pitied, for at that price our life may be worth having." But when he looked forward to this end of all things—for a secret presentiment that his last days were approaching was very constantly before him—Thomas was far from finding within him that steadfast faith which animated Mme. Necker, and which she used to say was strong enough to crush the fear of death. In the sincerity of his heart he did not try to dissimulate from her his anxieties, which would mingle themselves together with his confused hopes:—

My life is gliding away (he wrote to her), and years rush on with great swiftness. Let me lose as few moments as possible in loving that which I ought to love, so that at least I may live with her image when I cannot live with her herself. The more I advance in my career, the more all life appears to me as a dream. This dream is a happy one to me, for it has been given to me to meet upon earth her who has inspired me with such pleasing sentiments. When it is all over I will thank heaven for having vouchsafed it to me. Ah! who can tell what will come after a dream so extraordinary as this? Rousseau, when dying, when his eyes were just about to close, contemplated that glorious face of nature that was escaping from him. He looked at the sun, the image of the Eternal Being who had created them both, and emblem of that life which he was going to lose. Where is he now? Does his soul take pleasure in wandering round about the poplars that are laid over his ashes? or has his ardent and rapid genius gone to join that divinity which he has sometimes painted with so much dignity and so much grandeur? Is the power of death sufficient to bring together two creatures whom the infinite drags asunder? The human

imagination left to itself loses itself, and becomes confounded in the thought of its own ideas. The imagination must dwell upon the dignity of virtue to dare to wish for hope, and must perceive that there is a bond of communication between God and man. A soul such as yours cannot ignore him who has created it. The human mind in its weakness has sought out a revelation; the image of great virtue is a revelation that God has given to us upon earth.

> Qui vous connait, voudroit être immortel,
> Qui vous imite un jour est sûr de l'être.

The impossibility that a soul so perfect as Mme. Necker's should be annihilated together with its fragile covering, was an argument to which Thomas often liked to revert when troubled by uncertainties that would arise in his mind; and also the hope that he should again see her once more appeared to him to be one of the happiest aspects of immortality:—

Ah! how pleasant it is to think of the communication between the two worlds, of those invisible links ever subsisting between those souls and ourselves. How pleasant it is to think that this eternal silence is only apparent, that the grave is only as a passage into another province of the universe; that those of whom we have been fond can once more hear us speak to them, even though they do not answer; that their soul may sometimes come down into ours, there to partake of our sorrows; that there is a feeling and a life beyond the limits of our present state of sensibility, never more to be stayed or hindered; that there is an everlasting harbour of refuge ready to receive the waifs and strays over whom we are now lamenting. According to these pleasant and consoling thoughts, we have at least not lost everything; those whom we love are only absent from us. Life

wherever it may exist, touches and communicates with life by means of thought. Our relations, our friends, taken away from our eyes, exist for us even as God himself; they are a long way from us in nature, they are near to us in our conscience and in our hearts. We are sure that the circle in which we live, though we cannot measure the circumference of it, has a point which stretches on to them.

Do you not think with me that of all man's ideas that of death is perhaps the most active, and extends the farthest? It no sooner occurs to us, than our minds are at once wandering in the ideas of time, space, eternity, the finite, and the infinite. It hurls us into the profundities of divine nature of which we strive to learn the meaning, towards which all our thoughts direct themselves, as drowning men will stretch forth their arms for help to save them. The idea of life makes us linger over those objects which strike upon our senses, and also, so to say, upon the surface of existence; the idea of death opens to us the world of thought, of the soul, a world of a deeper and unknown existence. It makes us scan the heavens, the worlds, God himself, to find a shelter against the destruction that threatens us. There have been minds upon the earth who must have first conceived the doctrine of immortality, but they were too great to be confounded with that which must perish. The suspicion, even, that they would cease to be for one day, would seem to accuse the Divinity, and man cannot separate from the idea of God that which is like himself; for are sublime virtues anything else than divine ideas themselves put into action which come to show themselves upon the earth? To have known you would alone have been sufficient to make one conceive and adopt these large ideas of man's state. I felt this when I had the happiness of being with you. I feel it again in reading what you have written, and in recalling to mind all that I have seen when I have been alone. For all your life comes before me, and all your years fill the days and the moments that I pass

away from your company. Your kind friendship softens for me the thoughts of my troubles. Of all consolations this is the softest, and that which finds its way furthest into the heart when it is wounded.[1]

It was from the mountains in Provence that Thomas wrote to Madame Necker this letter in which he opened out his wounded heart. His bad health obliged him to spend the last years of his life away from her in the south of France. The wish that had formed itself in her mind, as she explained to him in one of her letters, was soon to be realised. She wrote:—"In my romantic dreams I like to think that they will erect a statue to me at Saint Ouen. You will write the inscription, and you will contemplate upon it in your solitary walks. Then, insensibly, my ideas will find a place in your imagination. My faults will have been blotted out by death, and you will say: 'She is no longer alive for me, but she gave to me the best of friendship. It was here that she put into my heart her own thoughts and her own feelings. Nothing troubles her now; she cannot change her nature, but she must take pleasure in my sorrows.'" Thomas died at Oullins, in the country house of the Archbishop M. de Montazet,[2]

[1] A copy of this letter was lent by M. Necker, and after Thomas's death was published in the complete collection of his works.

[2] Antoine Malvinde Montazet, born in 1712, was Bishop of Autun, and afterwards Archbishop of Lyons. He died in 1788. He was received into the French Academy in 1757.

when he was not much more than fifty years of age. He died in the arms of his friend Ducis, but this solemn hour cannot have passed by without his turning his thoughts towards the woman who had occupied such a large space in his life. He died as she would have wished to see him die, looking to religion to find the last word upon those problems which had agitated his mind, and for the confirmation of those hopes that had upheld his heart. Mme. Necker's sorrow was very great, as we may see from the many letters she received condoling with her. "A friendship of twenty years, and a heart such as yours," Moultou wrote to her. "Ah! I felt for you all the bitterness of your pain. His works will cause his name to be respected, and your friendship for him will show him to have been superior to his works." By common consent she was entrusted with the care of perpetuating his memory; and Saint Lambert, upon whom fell the duty of receiving Thomas's successor in the Academy, addressed himself to her to collect materials for his discourse. "I did not think, madam, I should now have to beg of you to trouble yourself with noting down the principal features in the character of M. Thomas. Such an occupation might well be painful to you; but I also reflected, madam, that the day might come when it would be pleasing to you, and when it would serve in some measure to lessen

your sorrow." And Thomas's friends submitted to her consideration the different projects for an epitaph, which, according to the custom of those days, they wished to place upon his tomb. Among these there was one so worded as to be not unpleasing to Mme. Necker, and which, after the various complimentary phrases then in vogue, terminated

> Amicitiæ serviens, ac pie moriens,
> Æternitatem occupavit.

Friendship, religion, and eternity were the subjects that most occupied the thoughts of these two friends in their peculiar intimacy, and in reading these words upon Thomas's tomb, Mme. Necker might have thought she was listening to an echo of one of their former conversations under the lime trees at Saint Ouen.

What, then, was the nature of this woman, who, in spite of the reputation for coldness and severity with which the world has credited her, had the gift of creating in the minds of others such lively and such strong feelings; who, as a girl, had received all that sort of complimentary admiration which will be ever pleasant to the feminine mind; who, as she grew older, gained the affectionate enthusiasm of Mme. d'Houdetot; who won for herself a place in the heart of Buffon; and who was regarded with fondness by the austere-minded Thomas; and who, as a wife, loved her husband

and was beloved also by him, and yet could secure for herself the cordial approbation of so many? Hitherto I have endeavoured to describe only the circle of friends with which she was surrounded, and I have drawn her, so to say, only in profile, speaking of her acquaintanceships or of her intimacies with men who assuredly were good judges of those charms which appertain only to women. But if the reader wishes to be assured, as I hope to be able to prove to him, that Mme. Necker was not wanting in originality nor in pleasing manners, it is, perhaps, now time to attempt a full free portrait, and with the aid of private documents to show her as she was in her everyday home life, and how she acquitted herself of those duties in the well-doing of which consists woman's happiness and her title to honour. We shall see what a warmth of heart there was underlying her apparently regulated mannerism, and we shall also see that in her natural disposition and in the strength of her feelings, she was in very fact the mother of her own daughter.

END OF VOL. I.

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